

AN ARROW BOOK



HOUSE IN THE DUST

**DORIS
LESLIE**



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Jennifer Drew, standing before

a blitzed and bomb-shattered house in 1940,
relives the story of London sixty years before.
This was the time when the Empire at its peak
thrived under the matriarchal authority of
the ageing Queen. In Jubilee year, when
Jennifer was eighteen, she was presented at
Court. Later that season she should have made
a 'suitable marriage' but she rebelled against
the social conventions of her time and the
domination of her tyrannical father, and in one
impulsive gesture she broke away to marry
the man of her choice. The result of the marriage
and the problems it involved make a dramatic
and unusual story.

HOUSE IN THE DUST

1.60

By Doris Leslie

FULL FLAVOUR
FAIR COMPANY
CONCORD IN JEOPARDY
ANOTHER CYNTHIA
ROYAL WILLIAM
POLONAISE
FOLLY'S END
THE PEVERILLS
WREATH FOR ARABELLA
THAT ENCHANTRESS
A TOAST TO DADY MARY
PERIDOT FLIGHT
THE GREAT CORINTHIAN
AS THE TREE FALLS

DORIS LESLIE

House in the Dust



ARROW BOOKS

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‘. . . I feel assured that there is no such thing as ultimate *forgetting*; traces once impressed upon the memory are indestructible; a thousand accidents may and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind. Accidents of the same sort will also rend away this veil. But alike, whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever.’

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

ON either side of that which once had been a house, the Terrace curved in a complete half-circle to terminate at one end in a cul-de-sac, and at the other, unobtrusively, to pass into the Square. Here, at the time of its erection when Victoria was young, had been embalmed in stucco the claims of a possessive world, the incarnation of an age when all concrete security was cloistered in tradition, wherein no rise or fall of nations, no cataclysmic tide, no hurling death, no horrific combustion, could shake or shatter its foundations.

The shape of things like these was yet to come.

The Terrace, built a decade later, seemed, as it were, an off-spring of the Square; a shade less pompous, a storey less in height, a trifle narrower of bulk, but bearing all the features of its parent; the same enduring matriarchal dignity that the passing of a century had not erased, but only veiled in a dust.

Beneath that dingy film might yet be savoured by the few that sensed it, the faint aroma of a gilt-edged period; could still be seen by those who had the mind to watch, the dim procession of a line of ghosts, crinolined and pantalooned, frock-coated, bonneted and bustled, marching firm of tread in measured pace, or swaying with hiss of silk and froth of petticoat to the sound of hoof and rubber-tyred wheel.

No dreary sad insignia of 'Flat to let,' of 'Service suites,' of 'Chambers, war-time rental,' impinged upon those shabby doors, could dispel that tenuous illusion, enhanced the more, perhaps, by very reason of the gaping void that severed past from present.

Outside Number Twenty a group of passers-by had gathered, apathetically to gaze upon the shambles. The sight of it to none of them was strange. The order of each life of Londoners this month of September 1940, had been so individually, peculiarly changed, that skies might fall and yet one still might live. For that miracle at least one could be grateful.

Number Twenty alone of all the Terrace had been victimized; and what struck the strayed observer most to see, was how the houses either side of it escaped. There they stood upright;

windowless, maybe, and scarred and torn, their roofs bomb-shattered but unbowed, shouldering each a gap as in a clear whole row of teeth where only one is missing. So, viewed suddenly and in perspective it might seem. Yet a nearer and more intimate survey would disclose a nightmare vision, unreal and unbelievable; insane. A mound of fallen masonry and plaster, a rubbish heap harbouring entities that had astoundingly survived extermination. A ragged edge of wall, gaily distempered; a porcelain enamel bath upon its side; a velvet cushion, suppurating a grey matter of down; a stout armchair in a loose cover of flowered chintz, relic of that time when it had graced the 'Parlour,' kicking a flounced leg from the rubble, as though in death it dared defy respectability.

And stranger than all of this was the view that lay behind it; trees, and a vista of sooty garden, and the windowless face of the house at the back, screened till now by a cliff of brick and mortar. It, too, had received its own share of concussion, and stood as though agape and staring at the tumbled mound of debris that had been the garden wall. . . .

The road was never much frequented—it led nowhere; no more than half a dozen passers-by had stopped to look. A little old lady, dressed in summery grey with a touch of white about it, her hair silvery beneath the brim of her small mushroom-shaped hat, her hands in transparent black lace gloves, very full of her bag, her umbrella and gas-mask. An errand boy, whistling unconcernedly while with one blasé eye upon the damage sorted parcels from his grocer's basket. A mother with her baby in a pram and a small son beside her. A hatless girl in brown corduroy slacks, with a shock of boyish hair and a warden's helmet slung across her shoulder. Her companion, a slouching fellow with a stoop and horn-rimmed spectacles. A war-reserve policeman obviously new to his job; a slender piebald cat, and on her knees beside it in the dust, a stoutish woman with a foreign accent and a scarf upon her head, who offered words of comfort and raw meat.

"Poor leetle . . . she be 'ungry, isn't it? That will do for 'er till the A.R.P. Animals come. Poor pooss."

"Look, she's givin' poor pussy 'er meat rations," the mother told her son.

"Two killed," said the girl warden, "a woman and a child—in the basement. The two top floors were empty, the first and second had minor casualties, and three badly injured below."

"There you are, you see," aggressively returned the slouching fellow, "you're just as safe up as down. Safer in fact. You don't stand a dog's chance with everything coming on top of you."

"What I think is," said the girl warden, "if you're for it—you're for it. Isn't it queer how the cats will stay?" And she and the man moved on.

"I want the pussy," said the mother's son.

"You can't have the pussy," said his mother; and to the little old lady who had edged imperceptibly nearer, she added, "Funny how one in a row will come down like that, while none of the others are touched. My husband's in the deemolition, and he says he'd never believe it possible how some of them escapes, and others don't. . . . Come away from there, will you? And leave the poor pussy alone."

"Are you not sending your children from London?" abruptly queried the old lady.

"Nowhere to send 'em. Don't like the idear of 'em goin' to strangers, and the Gov'ment don't give 'arf enough to keep and feed 'em anyway. Besides one place is as safe as another, strikes me. A friend of mine had her three evacuated to the heart of the country, and a bomb fell on the house and killed one and injured the other two. One doesn't know *what* to do, reelly. . . . At least if they're with me and our number's up, then we shall all go together."

The foreign woman rose from her knees, and brushed the dirt from her skirt, remarking, "I have seex cats at home I have saved from bombed houses. They will not leave their own place. They stay and starfe."

"Stan," his mother bade him, "come away from that glass. Do you hear me?" And to the old lady, in an undertone, she said, "Italian, I should think, or one of them refugees. Talk about friendly aliens. Friendly aliens, my foot! My husband says there's any amount o' signalling goes on after black-out. The Gov'ment must be barmy not to intern the lot."

"It is very good of you to take care of these poor little creatures," said the old lady clearly.

The foreign woman shrugged, and smiled round at her. "I have a delicatessen shop and I can give them scraps. We have to save the cats and dogs or we have plagues of rats soon."

The mother, still addressing herself exclusively to the little old lady said, "Plagues of everything, I should think. My husband says the smell down in them craters is somethink awful. They

can't get them out sometimes for days. There's been a child under 'ere for the last week."

"A child!" echoed the little old lady on a breath. And her eyes, dark and surprisingly young in her small withered face, for the slice of a second were closed.

The mother gave her a sharp upward look. "Seems like fate, or something, don't it? 'Ow one'll go and another not. One in a row and all the others standin'. I wonder what the people who *used* to live 'ere would say if they could come back now. They've not missed much. Anyone 'oo's born to this is cursed if you ask me." And to her son she called, "Come on," and seized him by the hand and pushed the perambulator on its way among the broken glass.

"If they could come back . . . now," whispered the old lady; but she spoke to no one for she stood alone. The policeman had moved on, the foreign woman too; only the piebald cat was left, ravenously eating. The tiny crunch of its teeth sounded loud in the hush that had fallen. . . .

"COME away from that glass. . . . Do you hear me?"

A pane of the nursery window that looked out on to a square black patch of earth, called by courtesy the Garden, had been broken. The floor was strewn with scattered bits; they sparkled on the horse-hair sofa, the dark red damask table-cloth; they glinted on the cushion of Nurse's fender chair. A shiny pool like melting ice lay temptingly upon the carpet. One might tread on that to hear it crunch—but——

"You've done enough mischief for one day," Nurse said. "You and your Mee-mee between you. Not to mention how you'll catch your death of cold sitting in a room with a hole the size of a man's 'ead in the window. And what your Pa will have to say, goodness only knows. Drat that lazy slut, then! Why don't she answer the bell?"

Nurse went to the bell-rope to pull it again for Alice to come and clear up.

I, subdued by that allusion to Papa, sat quiet enough on the edge of my chair while Nurse gave her orders to Alice, who returned with her dustpan and brush. The noise of glass tinkling into the dustpan was a pleasant cool watery sound to make you think of fountains.

It had not always been a nursery. Time was when we lived on the top floor of all up six flights of stairs, the last of them barred by a gate. But when Belle and Laura Came Out and wore bustles, they had the day nursery for their sitting-room, and Nurse and I went down below to the room that was next to the pantry.

It was not such a big room as the nursery upstairs, but I liked it better, for it opened through french windows directly on to one of those grassless squares of back-yard common to most town houses of the period. The 'Cat-run,' Nurse called it, with her sniff. It had, however, one advantage. It joined a proper garden, separated from it only by a wall with a trellis

on the top, so that by standing on a chair you could talk through the trellis to Mimi, who lived in the house at the back.

If the nursery had not been moved below I might never have known the O'Connors, Mimi, Mitzi and Mike. Mimi always called her parents by their names, so I did too Looking back upon it now it seems as though my life were something like the House that Jack built; each fresh contact, each adventure, inevitably linked, and all converging from some centrifugal point. I am no fatalist, but if one lives as long as I one cannot help but wonder at the Craftsmanship that weaves the chain of life's events. This is the house at the back. This is the gap in the trellis that leads to the house at the back. This is the music of Michael O'Connor heard in the house at the back. This is Jennifer Drew meeting Jonathan Rourke in a room in the house at the back. . . .

Nurse had been Belle and Laura's nurse too before my mother came to be their governess. I always thought it odd that these two should be my sisters. They were so exactly—aunts. They gave me presents on my birthday and at Christmas, and every Boxing Day, Belle, Laura, Nurse and I went to see the pantomime at Drury Lane. Sometimes Papa came with us, then we had a box and Nurse sat behind and saw nothing.

I never knew my mother. It was Nurse who listened to my prayers when I knelt by my cot in the dingy night nursery, the walls of which were papered to imitate marble, brown with a blue and rose vein. There was an old screen in that room. I remember, made out of scraps. It stood by the door to keep away draughts, and was a source of endless enjoyment to me. I never knew how it came to be there, or who, with what diligence, had pieced it together, nor could anyone tell me. "Since before you were born and the girls too, it's been there," Nurse said. "And what does it matter who made it?"

But it mattered a great deal to me, who pored with unfailing interest over the faded pictures, and over one in particular of a high-bosomed young lady in pink standing by a stile with a gentleman in blue, whose arm most affectionately was round the lady's waist, her head, very golden, on his shoulder. This gave me most enjoyable sensations. There was also one of Lazarus in yellow rising from the dead, while Martha in purple and Mary in green looked on in great surprise. This was alarming, and I would hurry to the next which depicted a scarlet-coated soldier with a bandaged head, kneeling by the body of a very stiffened horse; and this I found painfully sad. Over the mantelpiece hung an engraving of a

Landseer dog with a partridge in its mouth; and above my bed an illuminated text framed in straw, 'Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid,' which produced in me the reverse effect of its intention, since I took it to be a perpetual reminder of the Holy Ghost, whom nightly I expected would appear in white from behind the screen. Indeed I could never understand how anything so frightening could be one with the Father, to whom I prayed as Nurse had taught me, "God bless Papa, my sisters and Grandpapa and Poor Aunt Rosie, and all kind friends and please God bless me and make me a good obedient little girl. . . . Can I ask God to bless Mamma too?" I inquired.

"God has blessed your Mamma by taking her to Heaven," Nurse told me, which was the first I knew of it.

I did, however, hear something more upon the subject which did not, at the time, much enlighten. It was on an afternoon when Nurse's sister, Phœbe, came to tea. I was asleep on the table. Nurse always put me to sleep on the table for two hours after dinner, when I was very small. The table would be pushed against the wall, and I laid upon it on a cushion. I must have woken before my time for, "Poor Motherless Dear," I heard, in a murmuring voice that never was Nurse's. Nurse always spoke as though the hinges of her words had turned rusty and needed oiling, like the nursery door when it began to creak.

"She don't miss a mother's care with me on the spot," said Nurse, in that voice, with her sniff. "A happy release. I say, poor soul. The life he used to lead her! *And* Number One, believe me."

"Hard for a man to lose both his wives," came the murmur. "But who knows? There might yet be a third."

"Chance is a fine thing," said Nurse. "He'd have a job to find one even with his money."

"Who'd have a job to find what with his money?" I asked, sitting up.

"No one's talking about money. I said a little pot of *honey* from the bee. Look here what Phœbe's brought you. . . ."

Papa was a name like God. Papa was bearded, too, and high like God: so high that from below it was difficult to see his head without craning back your own. His voice was loud. He bellowed. When he stooped to kiss you, which he never failed to do on those occasions when he visited the nursery, your face became full of his golden-brown beard and moustache. Papa's cheeks, or at least all that could be seen of them for hair, were a healthy red, and his eyes above the cheeks were like blue stones, hard

and polished. He pinched your face; he patted you. He said, "Well, well, and how are we to-day? How are we, Nurse? A little peaked, I fancy?"

"Not more than usual sir," said Nurse, turning sour, "considering we're living in a basement."

"Basement? Basement? How can you possibly call this room a basement when the window opens on the level?"

Nurse folded her mouth and said nothing. It had long been a bone of contention that she and I must have the lower room, while Belle and Laura had the top.

Every morning Papa read prayers, with Belle and Laura, Nurse, myself, and all the servants on their knees. Every Sunday we flocked to church, two by two, with Papa at the head of the procession. Once I was sick in the pew, to be hurried out by Nurse and taken home in a four-wheeler.

Papa came to the nursery later to say, "Disgusting. Positively disgusting. One might expect some such filthy exhibition of that sort to happen in a slum, but not in my family pew. You had better get the doctor."

"She don't need the doctor, sir," said Nurse with her sniff. "She never turned sick till the sermon, from sitting still so long. 'Tisn't natural."

"Natural? What do you mean—it isn't natural? Do you call it *un*-natural then for a child to behave like a Christian?"

"I wasn't saying nothing about her behavin', or not behavin' like a Christian——" Nurse began.

"And don't you," Papa interrupted, "take me up in that insolent manner. Give her dry rusks for dinner, and milk. Does she drink enough milk? See that she drinks enough milk."

"If two quarts a day ain't enough—then what is?" grumbled Nurse as Papa left the room. "Much he knows or cares. Milk!"

Papa came to inspect the broken window.

"Hey? What's this—what's this? God bless my soul!" He had a way of swinging round upon you, and glaring down until you seemed to shrivel, until you had no size at all; his voice swelled and filled the room. "Are you a street-arab?" He almost always said the same thing twice. He would take a word and worry it as a dog would take a bone. "Throwing stones like a gutter-bred street-arab."

"It was nothing but the ball, sir," Nurse, stout and starched in her white apron, waddled in between the shrinking me and my Papa. "They were playing ball."

"They? They? And who may I ask, are 'They'?"

"The little girl from the back, sir."

"The back? What little girl from the back? Do you mean that music master's daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"So!" Papa drew in a breath, his eyebrows came down, and his nose went up, crinkling above his moustache; his beard quivered on his shirt-front. "So you allow her to hob-nob with that piano-playing rag-tag—that piano-playing organ-grinder's daughter."

"She has no little friends of her own age, sir," said Nurse.

"Is that any reason why she should be permitted to behave like a street-arab and hob-nob with an organ-grinder's daughter, breaking my windows? Playing at—what *were* you playing at?" Papa swung round again, glaring. "What game were you playing at? Answer me."

"Cricket, Papa," I piped, quaking.

"Cricket!" Papa exploded. "Cricket! Do you call that a game for a girl—a potential young lady?" He blew himself up and turned upon Nurse. "So you allow her to play cricket. And where may I ask does she play? In the back-yard?"

"In the other garden, sir," said Nurse.

There was a pause.

"The *other* garden," echoed Papa, awfully. "The other *garden*? What other garden?"

"The O'Connors' garden, sir," said Nurse.

"The O'Who's?" asked Papa, deeply.

"It's Mimi," I blurted all in a breath, "Mimi O'Connor. She lives in the house at the back. There's a loose place in the trellis, and I can climb over the wall now instead of walking round."

"Instead of walking round?" repeated Papa, and he smiled: only it wasn't a smile. A show of teeth, merely, between his moustache and his beard. "So instead of walking round you climb over the wall. Go on." And on I went, spurred by my fear into courage.

"It's such a big garden . . . such a dear little house. And Papa, please may I learn the piano?"

"Oho!" Papa was smiling still, but he looked terrible. "They tout for pupils, do they, these organ-grinders? They beguile with games of ball—I beg your pardon, cricket—my daughter from my house to tout for pupils. They break my windows, and teach my daughter the manners of the gutter. As for you——", he

turned so suddenly on Nurse, that she, taken off her guard, backed and trod upon my toe to make me yelp. "As for you, what are you about to permit an intimacy with these people? I hold *you* responsible for this—and for that broken window. The cost of repairs will be deducted from your wages. And understand me," roared Papa, "I forbid her to walk round, I positively and finally forbid any further acquaintance with these—Irish."

The scene closed on that last word; and as though blown thence on the wind of it, my father departed from the room.

I wept.

"Now, now," said Nurse, "don't fret yourself. Your Pa's bark is much worse than his bite."

And that incident of the broken window did, I think, assure me that Papa's bark was certainly worse than his bite; nor need it be implicitly obeyed. He could bellow and shout, and he did. He could smile and show his teeth, dreadfully, but none of this could mar my whole existence—providing Nurse was on my side. Nor was I afraid of him to the exclusion of my peace. For instance, after that commotion over being friends with Mimi, Papa seemed entirely to forget what he had said, and the fuss he'd made about my walking round. True, conscience forbade a total disregard of orders. There was no further need to 'walk' round. The gap in the trellis had cleared all obstacles there. I still could climb over the wall. But that he never knew and no one would ever tell him. If he had looked out of the window of his study, he could have seen me playing in Mimi's garden scores of times. But the lower part of his window was of leaded, frosted glass, and only the top was clear, and never in summer or winter did he open it; besides which, he might not have recognized me if he had looked out, because he was short-sighted. This he never would admit, though he wore on a black watered-silk ribbon an eye-glass, which when *in extremis* he used, and which Mimi told me should have by rights been green. When I asked why, she said, "Nero, and I'll tell you of him one day."

Mimi had so much to tell that not if I had passed every hour of the twenty-four in the cottagey house at the back, could I ever have heard the whole of it.

Mimi lived in Gayton Road, a little narrow road that looked as if it had been left over from the time when all this part of London was the country. There were gardens full of flowers back and front of all the houses, none of which was higher than the second floor of ours. Mimi's house was painted white and had

green shutters. On either side the front door were small bay trees in tubs. There was a brick-paved, lavender-bordered path, dividing a lawn the size of a pocket handkerchief; at the back a longer, wider stretch of garden with an almond tree and marigolds and a tangle of nasturtiums. And Mimi's garden ended at the wall of our back-yard.

Under that wall in his own little house lived Sir Joshua, and lower down, screened by the lilac bush, lived Mouzel and Punch in the wooden hut where Mike developed his photographs. Mike had one of those cameras—a novelty in those days—that pulled out like a concertina and stood on top of a tripod. Fearsomely hooded in black he took likenesses of Mimi and Mitzi; he took one of me, too, in a velvet dress with a tartan sash and a collar of white guipure.

If Michael O'Connor had not been born lazy, if he had been just a little less gifted, if he had not to earn a bare living wage by teaching young ladies the Moonlight Sonata, and grinding the moon from his soul, he might have struck his own note in posterity. As it is he strikes it nowhere except here, in my thought of him. And I have reason to remember though others may forget.

He had a Viennese wife, whom he had met and married when both were students at the Conservatoire in Paris. Mitzi gave singing lessons to young lady pupils in the house in Gayton Road. One could hear from the basement nursery in the Terrace, their O-ah-oo's and scales up and down. Sometimes Mitzi sang at the piano by herself. Almost always one heard music in that house.

Mimi had all of her father's wit and much of her mother's beauty—for Mitzi O'Connor was beautiful, though I was too young to have known it. Through veils of distance her daughter emerges dark and sprite-ish, with Mike's eyes, deep-set and smoky blue, and short hair, straight as rain, cut in a fringe across her forehead. She was pale, she was small, she was ten . . . and I was nine in 1878.

* * *

It was the year that had brought Beaconsfield from Berlin to proclaim peace with honour to the crowds in Downing Street and to receive the Order of the Garter from his enraptured Queen; the end of a decade that had made Victoria an Empress, and swung open the gates of the Suez Canal as the key to her Eastern possessions.

But that sky though bright was not unclouded; any moment a storm might spring up from the farther quarters of the globe. There were murmurs in Afghanistan and Zululand. The Queen's protégé, the young Prince Imperial, son of the refugee Napoleon III, had been killed in a Zulu skirmish. The Queen was bitterly grieved and the weather was appalling. It rained day in and day out; harvests were flooded, the farmers in despair. In Ireland agrarian discontent increased. The ever-smouldering Irish question threatened to burst into flame. And that oriental wizard with his rings and things and primroses, who had worked wonders from Asia Minor to Potsdam, he had grown old, too old in service. He was tired. The day of the Tories was done. The world was moving slowly, irresistibly, towards democracy.

The Queen emerged from her cloisters at Windsor and went to concerts, drove in the Park, a grey little woman in weeds, grown stouter it was noticed, in retirement, acknowledging the greetings of her people with rare dignity and mournful bows.

I had my first sight of the Queen from the windows of Grandpapa's house, facing Kensington Gardens on the Bayswater Road. A ponderous, ugly house, like a thousand other houses of that time and place.

Built of brick, and plastered in stucco, it had an area below and a balcony above, and lofty rooms whose walls were covered in crimson and gold, manufactured by the yard to resemble stamped leather, or papered with a monstrous design of impossible flowers; rooms that were full of uncomfortable chairs, black marble mantel-shelves, massive mahogany; rooms of an age that has passed.

Grandpapa was over six feet tall and very thin—so thin that his legs, cased in close-fitting trousers strapped under his boots, looked like the legs of a stork. He had a white frill of hair low down on his head, but no hair at all on the top of it. Silvery whiskers—Dundrearies they called them—adorned his sharply boned cheeks and lean jaws. He possessed a sardonic sense of humour and a shrewd, mocking eye that saw more than his ears ever heard.

Aunt Rosie was very peculiar. Having lost most of her hair in a fever, she affected a straw-coloured wig that if not carefully adjusted would sometimes slip crooked, and lend to her face a strangely lop-sided appearance. She had pale watery eyes, a kind, empty smile and an embarrassing habit of repeating aloud those most intimate thoughts that should have been kept to herself.

She had too an obsession for perfumes, and had dozens of bottles of different varieties, half of which I am sure were never opened—in a medicine cupboard in her bedroom. She was greatly interested in clothes, and would drag her maid, Bartlett, to all Whiteley's sales to buy bargains in dress materials, bonnets or gloves, yet somehow she was always untidy. . . . And when she talked, poor dear, nobody listened.

Grandpapa seldom went out unless for a drive with Aunt Rosie. He sat all day long by the window of his library staring at the railings in the Park. He sat so still that but for his open eyes you might have thought him asleep.

The library—euphemistically styled since the only books it boasted were some dusty volumes on International Law, a set of Dickens and the Family Bible—was a long, double-doored room, with high windows at each end, shrouded in dark velvet curtains to keep out the light and keep in the smell, associated always with Grandpapa's house on the Bayswater Road. The smell of tobacco and biscuits, and Aunt Rosie's scent, and port wine.

Almost always when I went to see Grandpapa, Aunt Rosie would be seated at a small round table, at the far end of the room under the statue of Psyche, telling fortunes with the cards. She would say, "There's a dark" (or it might be a fair) "man to the house. I shall have to go upstairs in a minute," and she would put up her empty, smiling face for me to kiss. "Are you staying to tea?" she would ask. "If so we'll have buns. I'll tell Bartlett to get some iced buns."

She had Papa's trick of repeating her words, but she seldom waited for an answer to a question. "I've a shockin' bad place on my thumb. The doctor says it's a whitlow. I've taken Epsom salts." And Aunt Rosie would go to Grandpapa and tell him, "Wake up! Here's Jenny come to see you."

"Don't shout. I'm not deaf." He was; very. But like Papa he would never admit to a failing. "How are you, m'dear?"

When Grandpapa smiled, the folds either side of his long, shaven upper lip disappeared in his silvery whiskers. His whole face seemed to twinkle. He would take out his silk pocket handkerchief to wipe his mouth before kissing me, and would say, "Bring the child a chair."

"I must go upstairs in a minute," said Aunt Rosie. "Give me a shilling, please, will you?" She would push forward a chair for me to sit, and would say, shouting in Grandpapa's ear, "You owe me a week's pocket money. I want a shilling of it now for buns."

"For what?" Grandpapa's head came round.

"Iced buns," screamed Aunt Rosie. "You owe me a sovereign."

"She won't be happy till she gets it," Grandpapa would say with his twinkle, and fumbling in his waistcoat pocket for a small round silver case he would take from it a gold piece. "Here you are, and don't spend it on rubbish."

"Thank you," said Aunt Rosie. "I've a stomach-ache. I shall have to go upstairs."

And she would wander away, while Grandpapa, replacing the sovereign case in his pocket, would sit staring out of the window, with the smile gone out of his eyes. . . .

For the first time in weeks, the sky had cleared; the pavements glistened, reflecting patches of blue in the puddles. Open carriages splashed by bespattering pedestrians. Behind the Park railings top-hatted gentlemen walked with their ladies in gay-coloured gowns.

"If this weather continues," said Grandpapa, "the farmers may yet save the harvest."

"Yes, Grandpapa. I've been out playing cricket."

I could tell Grandpapa I had played cricket without any fear of results. I could tell Grandpapa many things that I could tell to no one else, knowing that he would never scold, but would listen intently, and say, "Cricket? The deuce you have! Is that the sort of game girls play nowadays? We played it in chimney-pot hats."

Chimney-pot hats! That made me giggle. Grandpapa could be ever so droll.

"And what else have you been doing since I saw you last?" he would ask, with his twinkling look.

I told him, "Compound long division."

"Confound who?"

I repeated it. "*Sums*, Grandpapa," I explained.

As befitting a daughter of the upper middle class, my education was consigned to an instructress, who, in the distribution of knowledge, earned less than the average cook. This knowledge consisted of elementary arithmetic, a smattering of English grammar, English history, the use of the globes, with music and drawing thrown in. Thus the Victorian maiden, her existence justified solely by marriage, was equipped for her journey through life to her Ultima Thule.

"I want to learn the piano," I said. "Papa says Miss Sharp can teach me, but I would rather learn from Mike—from Mimi's father. If only I could!"

Grandpapa approached an ear. "If only you what?"

So I had to say it all over again, and might possibly have enlisted his aid in this crisis if it had not been for his interruption, " 'Pon my word! "

Grandpapa's whiskers quivered; he leaned forward to say, "If that's not the Queen, I'm a Dutchman."

"The Queen!" I scrambled down from my chair to rush to the window. "Oh, where—where's the Queen?"

"There, look—in front of you, driving by now. There she goes!" said Grandpapa, over my head. "D'you see her?"

I saw her—a dumpy old lady in black, with long veils, very small in her wide, open landau.

"Oh, so *that's* the Queen," I remarked, unimpressed.

For she looked less like a Queen than like old Mrs. Biggs who came twice a week to help Cook.

"Yes, that's the Queen," said Grandpapa, "comin' from—now where would she be coming from? Paddington, most likely, from Windsor. Without any palaver or fuss. Times have changed. I can remember when George the Fourth used to come up from Windsor in his coach—bowin' right and left, and painted to the eyebrows—the old rip! That was before he got fat. Towards the end he got so fat he used to drive in a closed carriage with the blinds drawn, ashamed for his people to see him. Hey, those were days. . . . I can remember when all this," Grandpapa said with a wave of his hand, "was fields, with a stream runnin' through—that was Bayswater. There used to be a tea-garden in Westbourne Grove, and just up the road there on Tyburn Hill, I've seen a man——" Grandpapa stopped.

"Go on, Grandpapa." For once he started talking there was no end to what he had to tell you.

"Never mind. I forget. Let's see what you know of history. Who was George the Fourth?"

I said I hadn't got as far as him. "I'm doing Henry the Fifth, the Battle of Agincourt."

"What? 'Show us the mettle of your pasture: let us swear that you are worth your breeding which I doubt not. . . . The game's afoot, follow your spirit, and upon this charge cry, God for Harry, England and St. George! . . . ' Damme! My memory's going. I used to recite that speech. We had recruitin' for the volunteers when we were fightin' Boney. I all but went for a drummer-boy myself when I was your age. Do you know that speech? Do you know your Shakespeare? You don't? God bless

me! All the girls of my day knew their Shakespeare. They used to quote him in their letters and dam' good letters they were too. I've had a few in my time," he chuckled to himself; then peering sideways at me, "I don't suppose," he said, "that you can spell your name. What does that Scrag—or whatever she calls herself—teach you? Why don't your father send you to boarding-school? Would you like to go to boarding-school?"

I considered: No. I didn't much like the idea of boarding-school. It would mean that I would have to leave Mimi and Nurse, to say nothing of Grandpapa. . . .

Nicholas Drew, the elder, senior partner in the firm of Hatter, Meade and Drew, solicitors, of King's Bench Walk, had spent the better part of fifty years in arranging mortgages and investing capital—his own and his clients'—at the highest rate of interest commensurate with safety. Sound of head and hard of heart, he could drive a bargain or foreclose on a deal with an uncanny insight that had earned for him among his brethren the surname of 'Old Nick.' It may not have been entirely unwarranted.

From a junior clerk in the office, the then young Nicholas Drew had taken highest degrees at the earliest age and worked his way up to a partnership. When the Hatter and Meade of the firm died without heirs 'Old Nick' was left in possession.

Not without a struggle did he resign the reins of office to 'Young Nick,' as Papa was called, who had never been young, as his father had never been old. Both were a product of their respective times. In him who had lived long enough to remember the birth of Victoria, had seen George the Fourth crowned, and supported the Whigs in their tussle with King William for Reform, there still lingered a trace of the Regency Buck. The flavour of those days that kept pace with the hoof and horn of the road, was still to be found in the hearts of those who were young with the century, before the tempo of the world was set to steam.

If long association with the care of money had quenched in 'Old Nick' a desire to put his shirt on the throw of a dice, he could still enjoy a game of whist at the Athenæum; nor had he lost his palate. True, he did not now run the course of three bottles, but he had not much use for any man unless he could. "You fellers to-day"—I can fancy how Grandpapa chuckled and watched Papa's face while he spoke—"You fellers to-day have no taste for wine or the good things of life. It's the same with your women. We chose 'em for more than their eyes and their size. They had spice, they had wit; they had brains. They had

flesh—you could feel it. They weren't cased in whalebone—padded with bolsters. Don't talk to me of your women!"

'Young Nick' never did. He would have cut his tongue out sooner than let it speak of that which in his own faith should be hidden. His father's winks and nods must have been to his mind a revolting exhibition of senility. As a pillar of a social scheme that thrived upon hypocrisy, 'Young Nick's' inner man was fed in secret. That sense of Victorian security which upheld the British Constitution, was manifest in the belief that any lapse from virtue was sinful only if exposed. In view of which 'Young Nick' had been a model husband to his wives, and had duly mourned them in correct attire for a year.

In his own life he was conscious only of one lapse, not of virtue, but of judgment. His unaccountable infatuation for the pale, dark-eyed girl, whom he had raised from obscurity to the rank of his name and position. And against his better judgment, weighed in the balance of his reasoning in taking to himself a penniless wife, a nobody, whose father was a captain, not of the Royal Navy, but of the Merchant Service (and therefore not a gentleman), who had come to his end in the sea when his ship went down off the Goodwins, against all this, with no family tree to support her, and no relatives save an unpresentable old grandmother in Barking, Nicholas Drew had married his daughters' governess. She died giving birth to me.

He accepted her death philosophically, and saw in her early demise a Divine intervention, a Wisdom surpassing his own. Had his poor Letty not been Taken, she might have created complications in the home circle. His elder daughters were of an age to have resented so young a stepmother. Believing, as became a churchwarden, that all things work together for good in them that love God, he raised to the memory of his second wife a marble slab in the church at the end of the Square. Then, lest such preference might not be quite in order, he raised a slab above it—to his first. But though my mother died, I lived: a perpetual reminder of a phase of folly it were better to forget.

I have often wondered if the emotion 'Young Nick' experienced in her arms, or if her too eager response to it, lacking just that amount of wifely reserve demanded of feminine chastity, may have roused in his mind a dingy suspicion that was never entirely stifled: to crawl, like a snake, from some shady lair in his depths and haunt him through the eyes of her daughter; which may have perhaps

accounted for the fact that discipline was seldom tempered with indulgence.

* * *

It must have been somewhere near the longest day of that wet summer when Belle and Laura, by permission of our father, gave a ball. For a whole week before the date fixed for the event, an air of bustling activity pervaded the house and everyone within it; everyone, that is to say, except Papa, whose mode of life, whose utterances, whose comings and whose goings, remained unshaken by upheaval.

Rout seats arrived in pantehnicons; doors of rooms were removed and carried below, to stand in the passage outside the day nursery. Drugget was laid on the drawing-room carpet and sprinkled with french chalk, over which Belle and Laura waltzed to make it slippery; I too, had a share in this, sliding my feet in their tracks, while Miss Sharp played the 'Blue Danube' with many wrong notes.

In the pantry, the parlourmaid, Hood, sorted glasses and silver. When I offered to help with the polishing, Hood took me by the arm and marched me to the door saying, "This way—if you please," and shut me out.

Nurse said, "Well, you asked for it, didn't you? You've no business to go in the pantry."

Boxes arrived, labelled Clarice of Bond Street. Belle's and Laura's maid, Martha, ran up and downstairs with gauzes and ribbons and scarves; there were flutterings of tissue-paper, a great to-do of trying-on and showing-off to Nurse for her opinion. On the day of the party I was excused my lessons, not by way of favour but because Miss Sharp had been commandeered to write the menus for the buffet. She sat at the dining-room table which had been covered with green baize, and pushed against the wall in preparation for the hired butler to come and lay it. Upstairs a final consultation was held with Nurse called in to give aid and advice, and Martha kneeling with pins in her mouth, to arrange the last touches.

Belle's gown was of turquoise blue faille fitting tight as a glove on the hips, and drawn into loops behind over a bustle; Laura's of amber surah, made in similar style, but trimmed with bows of red velvet and cascades of lace instead of loops, at the back.

"I can't make up my mind whether to wear flowers in my

hair or not." Belle twisted her head this way and that, as she stared at herself in the mirror. "I've ordered gardenias but I'm not at all sure——"

"I'm wearing moss roses," said Laura, "give me that hand-glass, Nurse, will you?"

Nurse pronounced her verdict: "Them bodies are cut too low. 'Tisn't nice for young ladies to show so much bosom."

"How ridiculous, Nurse. It's the fashion."

"Fashion or no, if you want to be decent you'll fill in them bodies with a frilling of lace. Your Pa'll carry on alarmin' when he sees you half naked."

"For shame!" giggled Laura.

"You never spoke truer," said Nurse, "shame it is, and that's my opinion."

"Now isn't that just like Nurse, to turn us against our frocks at the last minute!" cried Belle.

"Do mind out of the way," complained Laura, giving her a shove. "Don't keep all the glass to yourself. You wouldn't like to change over and let *me* wear the gardenias, would you? I don't think that moss roses are quite the thing for this yellow."

"I'm quite sure they are not. Dandelions would be better," Belle said, turning spiteful, "they would match the colour of your gown—and complexion."

"You pig! What a hateful thing to say!"

"No, it isn't," Belle retorted, "you *are* yellow"—Laura's hair was darker than Belle's, her skin clear and pale—"and you *chose* yellow. Personally I think yellow is a hideous colour, but you would have it."

"It's not yellow, it's amber, and it's much more uncommon than your blue. Every little shop-girl wears blue. And you're much too tight over the hips. Look, you're splitting already."

"Goodness, so I am. How did that happen? See to it, Martha, for mercy's sake. . . . Do *you* think it's too tight, Nurse?"

"If you want my honest opinion of them frocks," answered Nurse, "they're both too tight, and they show too much of your figure. And the style's too old—more fit for your grandmother. I like young ladies in white."

"White!" the young ladies scornfully chorused. "Like charity schoolgirls."

Martha removed the pins from her mouth to put in her word: "Oh, no, Nurse, these dresses are lovely, and ever so chick. You can't have anything chicker than this drapery at the back. And

them corsages are elegant just as they are. A frilling would spoil the cut. Madame Clarice knows exactly what's right for young ladies." Her tone implied that Nurse didn't.

Bored with this kind of talk, that held for me at that age, no interest, I slipped away unnoticed. On the top landing I paused to look out of the window. From that height, Mimi's garden appeared to have shrunk. The sun was coming through again; it had stopped raining. It might be possible to call Mimi out and climb over. With all this fuss in the house, I would never be missed. I went on down the stairs jumping the last three of each flight.

The drawing-room, without its doors and emptied of its furniture, looked very strange and deserted. I went in to have a final slide over the polished drugget. From the back drawing-room window, I looked out again. . . . Some blue in the sky, and the rain-wet roof of Mimi's little house, agleam. I could see Punch (part collie, part retriever with a touch of the black-and-tan) nosing about and snuffling under the wall for hidden bones. I could hear Mimi's mother singing a song that was all trills and delicious high notes that made me think of silver stars embroidered on white satin.

I turned away and went down to the basement and out at the door, past Hood's pantry. Standing on tiptoe to look over the wall, I called, "Coo-ee"—our signal note.

From inside Mimi's house came the answer, and there was Mimi in her red pinafore running up the steps into the garden.

"Are you coming over?" shouted Mimi.

"Yes, I'll get a chair."

I darted back to the nursery and lugged out the old Windsor chair. Mimi stood on the mound of mown grass and dead leaves we had made on her side so that her head could come above the level of the wall. It was easy to climb on to the wall from the chair and wriggle through the gap in the trellis, and slither down to the mound beside Mimi.

We played Tea-parties. Mouzel was fetched from his box, and Sir Joshua from his hutch. I was Alice. I would much rather have been the Mad Hatter, but Mimi always played that, in an old gibus of her father's, with the price label on the front, like the picture in the book.

Sir Joshua played the March Hare, as though born to it. He sat with his hands on the edge of the old iron table stained white with the droppings of birds, and he wouldn't budge till we all moved up one. Mouzel had to be held in his place for fear he

ran away and got eaten by cats, so we could only pretend to put his head in the doll's teapot, in case he got stuck there. Once he very nearly did, and we never dared risk it again. We had just got to the part where the March Hare says, "It's the best butter," when Mitzi called us to come in to tea.

"I mustn't stay," I said, longing to. But Mitzi told me, "Yes, you must. I have made cookies."

"Nurse doesn't know I'm here," I muttered.

"Prut!" (or some such unspellable sound, with which Mitzi always adorned her remarks). "If Nurse does not know, she cannot mind—isn't it? Come along, *kinder! Gott im Himmel!* That mouse! Go and wash your hands then and put the animals away."

"Can't we bring Sir Joshua?"

"Ach, no please—will you? Not when I have cleaned—just. He makes messes."

Tea at Mimi's was full of good things to eat. To begin with it never was tea—but milk coloured with coffee, and cakes such as never were seen anywhere else or anywhere since. Sticky brown cakes covered with hundreds and thousands and flavoured with cinnamon: cakes that were stuffed with sultanas and raisins; flat, shiny cakes with a thin ice of sugar, that tasted like the smell of Grandpapa's port. There was honey, not jam, and bread with a plaît down the middle sprinkled with caraway seeds.

I ate so much that I had to sigh to get rid of the bulge, and Mimi said grace: "I am so full I cannot pull another blade of grass."

"Listen," Mitzi put up a finger and her head on one side like a bird's. "That is your Miss Sharp again—not?"

From over the way in the drawing-room came the sound of thumps on the piano, which meant that Belle and Laura were waltzing to give the floor a last polish.

"*Jesu Maria!* But it is *murder!*" cried Mitzi; and she jumped up from the table and went to the piano which stood under the open window. A wall had been knocked down between two small rooms, to make one large enough to hold a grand piano—and there she sat and played, as Miss Sharp could never play . . . the 'Blue Danube.'

If the Hatter's tea-party was mad, this was madder. Mimi slid off her chair, and stood in her heelless slippers on the very tips of her toes—and raising her arms in a circle, she walked, still on the tips of her toes, into the middle of the floor, and there in her red pinafore she began to dance.

She made up the dance as she went along, to the tune of the 'Blue Danube.' Mimi danced with every bit of her body. She seemed made of flame, not of flesh; she was boneless; she bent backwards in an arch until her head touched her heels; she flung her arms about and pulled one leg up, and spun round on the tip of a toe, and fluttered her hands in the air, for all the world as though she were on wings, while her mother played and swayed from side to side on the piano stool, laughing; and her teeth were like white seeds between her scarlet lips. She never looked at the piano but at Mimi all the time, with her head thrown back, and her voice trilling out to make a song of it. . . . "Tralala la la—dat is good, tralala la la verree good, tralala lah . . ." drowning the sound of Miss Sharp in our drawing-room. I sat and watched, tingling from head to foot to the rhythm of the music, but my pleasure was more than half pain, for I knew however much I longed to play like that, I never could. . . . Then Michael O'Connor put his head round the door, to take up the tune in a deep bass voice. "Tumtee *Tah* tum tee *tah-ra* tum tee *tah!*"

And Mimi, flushed, excited, breathing hard, flopped down to do the splits.

"*Brava ballerina! Brava! Bravissima!*" shouted Mike, catching Mimi up by the hands to swing her round and say, "And is it dancin' without your ballet shoes, ye are, on your raw toes to grow corns on um?" And to his wife, "If I haven't forgotten to give Miss Solomon a lesson at Lancaster Gate, due at five o'clock—and me writin' me concerto on lavatory paper because I couldn't find me manuscript. You've hidden it away with your tidyin'."

"Ach, no, I did not then," protested Mitzi, "and your kaffee, it is cold now."

"Woman, what time have I for coffee? Or will I send Miss Solomon a telegram, Sorry I'm detained conducting me concerto in B flat at the Albert Hall to-night? Will I go and earn me half a guinea or will I not? Wait till I toss for it. Heads I go, tails I don't."

Everyone watched breathless while he spun a coin.

"Heads be damned to it! I'll take a cab and say I've been to me Ant's funeral."

There came a ring at the bell, and Nurse's voice in the hall, grumbling. "I've called and I've called from the back, but I couldn't make anyone hear, so I've had to walk round. . . ."

Strange how at that age—perhaps at all ages—consciousness

seems as it were to be multiplied, so that not one but half a dozen personalities, each a separate entity and each in itself sufficient, made up the sum total of Jennifer Drew. I who had watched Mimi dance like a flame in her red pinafore, had tingled and ached to the music, was now divided, estranged, from the child who received Nurse's scoldings with tears.

"I didn't do any harm. You were busy. You've not minded me going before. Why should you mind now?"

"Because you should have been resting," said Nurse, "for the party."

I stopped short in the middle of the pavement, and the tears half assumed to melt Nurse, dried in my eyes. "The party? Am I to sit *up* for it?"

"I don't know as you deserve to."

Oh, joy! To sit up for a party. Never before had this been allowed.

"Come along, do. I'm ashamed to be seen with you in that dirty pinny. No hat and no gloves. . . . And Lord sakes! Your hands! What have you been up to?"

"Nothing, only silly games, and Mimi danced."

"Oh, she did, did she? Fine goings on—making a bally dancer of that one at her age. She'll come to no good," said Nurse, glumly prophetic. "Hurry up now—and don't dawdle. I hope your Pa isn't home before we are, that's all—and you looking like a mudlark."

"What's a mudlark?"

"A dirty, low kind of bird," was Nurse's prompt, if inaccurate answer, "that lives in Thames mud along with the rats. When you and that Mee-mee gets playing together you lose all sense of decent behaviour. No wonder your Pa forbids you to know them. It's on my mind that I've shut my ears to his orders. You know perfectly well you ain't allowed over there without asking me first—going in the house to see her dance."

"I didn't know I was doing any harm."

"Didn't you?" Nurse sniffed. "Giving you ideas. You'll be askin' your Pa for dancin' lessons next."

"No, I won't. That sort of dancing's stupid," said this Jenny, believing it. For who'd want to dance in that silly way when they could go to a ball with grown-ups? "I'd much sooner learn to waltz, like Belle and Laura. If a gentleman asks me to dance to-night, do you think I may? I know the steps of the quadrille even if I can't waltz."

"No gentleman's likely to ask you," Nurse said, "you'll only be there to look on. . . ."

But that was pleasure enough with the lights and the music, the fine gowns of the ladies, coloured like all kinds of flowers, to hold me spellbound. In my best party frock of white India muslin, I sat on a rout seat as far removed as possible from the fearsome array of chaperons, who, ranged at intervals against the wall, maintained a sprightly flow of conversation that masked an undercurrent of anxiety. Every matron, mother of a maid, knew the grave import attached to these frivolities. The drawing-room of this Bayswater house was as much a hunting-ground as any jungle; each feminine curl, each pert turn of a shoulder, the sugary sweetness of the blonde, the warmer lure of the brunette, the flaming glory of the *rousse*—these the huntress's equipment; the bow and quiver of an Artemis.

Her quarry marked, her aim was sure; the excitement of the chase burned in the flush of her cheek, in the glow of her eye. She, no less than her Mamma, knew that her life's purpose was centred in the conquest of her prey. And time was short; a first, a second season—perhaps a third—no more; for after that would come the fear of failure, the fear of empty years ahead, to drain the warmth from her cheeks and that light from her eye, and halt her in pursuit of her fulfilment.

The mothers of such must suffer equal pangs; mothers of girls who, lacking knowledge of the hunt—or far worse, lacking charm—had not secured a partner, and were wallflowers. With what Spartan courage did their Mammams endure humiliation: with what stoical indifference did their glances sweep the room, while their features became more rigid, their smiles more widely stretched, their eyes a darting challenge in support of her, the nestling, sheltered in the shadow of a wing.

But from the countenance of those whose daughters could present a well-filled programme, suspense and tension magically lifted; the strain of watchful eyes relaxed; heads nodded with an affable complacence, marking time to the 'band'—composed of two violins and a piano behind a screen of palms and aspidistras. Well might they, relieved of all immediate anxiety, cast looks of pitying commiseration on girls less favoured than their own. Or the tactless might blunder, "Is your daughter not dancing?" "No, not too much . . . to-night. She . . ."

Thus by a pause, by the subtle inference conveyed in the dropping of the voice a semitone and the accompanying half-smile—

not depreciatory, but rather as it were, making a virtue of necessity—was the situation saved, her daughter's failure as a woman turned to her account by the delicate exigencies of sex. Superb example of feminine stratagem, prompted by the anguish of a mother's heart.

For me, however, all unconscious of the cruelties of life's devices, its tragedies, its chagrins and defeats, the evening's pleasure was undimmed. Not the sight of my father, standing in the doorway, bearded and immaculate in white tie and swallow-tailed coat—no, not though he turned his eye-glass to the clock and then to me, in sinister reminder of the fact that I had less than half an hour's grace before my bed-time, not even this could dispossess me of enchantment. Feet crossed, mittened hands folded, eyes everywhere, rapt and motionless, I stayed where I was seated.

The dresses—what an importance they assumed in that room full of bustled skirts and twinkling feet, as the whirling toilettes revolved before my dazzled eyes. The masculine black of trousered leg was extinguished in a froth of silk; Belle's blue and Laura's amber dissolved in the colourful medley; the atmosphere was drugged with the heavy perfume of fading roses, the frail scent of lilies of the valley; the delicate fragrance of *poudre-de-riz* mingled with a faint smell of perspiration. The shining pumps of the gentlemen were thinly veiled in a powdery film, kicked up from the chalk on the floor. Rum-tee-tum tee-tum-tum—they were dancing the polka. Coat-tails flew, white-gloved hands and collars dampened with exertion, bustles wagged and the heads of the chaperons nodded to the tune in the liveliest manner, while louder squeaked the fiddles and the piano rum-tee-tummed to drown the tinkle of voices and laughter, and bring the dance to its rollicking end.

The couples halted, the gentlemen bowed and offered their arms to their partners; the ladies dropped their trains, surreptitiously to rearrange their hairpins; the too tightly laced eased their aching sides with discreet inhalations. Behind the palms and aspidistras the pianist mopped his forehead. I looked at the clock, and then for Papa, but he had disappeared.

Laura, with roses in her hair and cheeks, passed on the arm of her partner. She stopped before me to say in a high voice, not at all like her own, "Well, darling, enjoying yourself?"

The shock of this unwonted attention from Laura, who had never to my knowledge called me 'darling' in her life—we were

not a demonstrative family—rendered me speechless; I could only nod and stare, and looked no doubt, as foolish as I felt.

“This is my little sister, Jenny, Mr Titterton,” said Laura, in that same unfamiliar high voice, her lips smiling. “Say how do you do to Mr Titterton, love.”

Love! This was too much. I swallowed a giggle and got to my feet, to bob as Miss Sharp—who followed the fashion in vogue in the ‘forties when she was a child—had taught me, and “How do you do?” I repeated, remembering not to shake hands.

The gentleman bowed from the waist, very stiffly, so stiffly indeed that he appeared to have been poured as molten wax into his suit and left to harden, so much, part of his clothes did he seem. His hair, greased and flattened with pomade, was all shine and no colour; his face, blotting-paper pink, his moustache an incredible gold. I am sure that Laura, a devotee of Ouida, must have thought him exceedingly handsome.

“I do very well, I thank you,” said he in that aggravating hearty manner adopted by most grown-ups when speaking to me, though to be sure, there were some exceptions: Mitzi and Mike and Grandpapa—and, of course, poor Aunt Rosie. “And how do *you* do, Miss Jenny?”

“Do you not care to take some refreshment, Mr Titterton?” said Laura, breaking in on my polite, if voiceless, “Quite well, thank you,” and showing her teeth in a smile that was less a smile than a rounding of the lips as though they were ready to kiss. I noticed a great many ladies smiled this way when talking to or dancing with a gentleman.

I do not know what answer—if any—Mr Titterton gave to Laura’s invitation, for, with my gaze riveted on her and fascinated by that unfamiliar smile, I observed my sister’s countenance undergo a startling change. Her lips stiffened, her chin dropped, her eyebrows lifted till they almost disappeared in the fringe of dark fluffy curls on her forehead; and following the direction of her eyes from which all expression save that of horror had fled, I saw in the doorless entrance, where a few minutes since Papa had been standing—Aunt Rosie.

Aunt Rosie had come to the ball accompanied by Grandpapa, who may or may not have had his own reasons for springing this unwelcome surprise on his elder grand-daughters. “Damme, why shouldn’t she go to the ball?” I can imagine the twitch of his long pointed nose, his sly twinkle, and that sad little shake of the head when he looked at Aunt Rosie, with the smile gone out of his eyes. “She gets little enough pleasure, God knows—

and so we'll *both* go to the ball!"

And both did: he in his evening-dress clothes, never worn since he attended the Lord Mayor's banquet in '75. There he stood behind Aunt Rosie, tall and upright, a full head and shoulders above her, and a very fine old gentleman he looked, too, with his silvery whiskers, his white cravat and winged collar, and in his buttonhole a white carnation. I can imagine how, determined to do the thing properly, he had sent Bateman, his butler, to the florist's to buy flowers for Aunt Rosie's treat: "Get what you can—roses, carnations. And get a carnation for me."

And there was Aunt Rosie, in magenta brocade with an enormous spray on her shoulder and diamond drops in her ears: on her bodice, a diamond star: in her hair—or her wig—crowned by a cap of cobwebby lace, which for all her maid's care had slipped slightly askew, shone another. . . . Poor Aunt Rosie! But she looked very happy, beaming on the company with her kind empty smile, and fanning herself with a little painted fan.

"Pray excuse me for one moment, Mr Titterton," murmured Laura, forgetting to purse her lips; "I must . . ." I did not hear the end of that, nor, I think, did Mr Titterton, for off Laura went in a hurry, and I saw her beckon Belle and pull her aside to whisper; and on Belle's face I saw that same horrified stare when she glanced in the direction of the door.

"Since your sister seems to have forsaken me, Miss Jenny——" Mr Titterton's voice at my side made me jump, "may I offer refreshment to *you*?"

"Yes, please," I answered promptly, for I remembered a glimpse of the dining-room table festooned with smilax and spread for a feast—cakes, bon-bons, jellies, pyramids of strawberries, great bowls of cream. I remembered, also, the arrival at the door of Gunter's van and two men carrying pails that contained, Nurse informed me, ices. And with that memory fresh in my mind: "I should like an ice," I said. "There are ices in the dining-room, unless" (awful thought) "they've all been eaten."

"Shall we go and see?" suggested Mr Titterton, and, bending, he crooked his arm for me to take; but even so, I found I had to stretch up mine to reach it.

I must confess I felt very grand at having secured so dashing a partner to eat ices with, and at leaving the ball-room on his arm like any other lady. On the way out we passed Belle talking earnestly to Grandpapa, and: "Pray excuse me for one moment,

Mr Titterton," said I, in Laura's best manner, "I must——"

And I darted to Grandpapa's side. Out came his handkerchief to wipe his lips as he stooped for my kiss.

"I'm going to have an ice," I whispered, "so I can't stay just now, but I'll come back in a minute and then perhaps you'd like to dance with me. I know the steps of the quadrille."

"Very," he said, "very." So I knew he hadn't heard a word of *that*.

I had no sooner rejoined Mr Titterton than Belle called after me: "Have you seen Papa anywhere, Jenny?"

As I had no desire to see Papa anywhere, and fearing to be sent in search of him, and thus lose all hope of my ice, I pointed vaguely in the direction of his study which was on the floor above. "He went up there," I told her. But under my breath I added 'not' as a sop to God who always listened. And having thus cleared my conscience before Him who knows all, I hurried Mr Titterton downstairs.

The dining-room was full of munching couples, but one glance reassured me that wherever he might be, Papa was not here. Keeping close to the heels of Mr Titterton, whom I had now come to regard as a friend—even though he would persist in talking to me as though I were five instead of ten—I managed to wriggle my way through a barricade of gentlemen to the buffet table.

Behind it stood two powdered and liveried footmen, and a butler with a very red face—these, hired from that Universal Provider whom I always found some difficulty in disconnecting from the Father of us all.

It was not, however, Mr Whiteley's butler nor his footmen to whom my eyes were drawn; not these on whom they feasted. The glimpse afforded of that spread was but a whisper, a shadow, of that which now confronted me. Chickens, hams, tongues and such, I passed over as unworthy of attention; one could have that sort of thing every day, but not those quivering jellies, those glutinous moulds, those luscious and creamy delights and bon-bons enough to fill the sweet shop round the corner.

"What kind of ice do you prefer?" Mr Titterton obligingly inquired. "Strawberry, vanilla, lemon or ——"

"Strawberry," I uttered faintly, and only remembered in time to say please.

The crowd of gentlemen standing at the table almost entirely obscured my view of it, but by some tactical manœuvring I

managed to edge my way past legs and under elbows until I was within sight and touch of a dish of pink fondants, each crowned with a crystallized cherry. I reached out to take one, and in doing so jogged the arm of a gentleman with a glass in his hand, and upset his wine—upon me!

The wine, icy cold, splashed on to my head, and soaked through my sleeve to my shoulder. Drops trickled down my neck and into my eyes. Greatly discomposed, I was about to beg his pardon, when the gentleman to my astonishment begged mine.

"Oh, but—it was my fault," I stammered, "I pushed you." And I burned; for had I not been in such a hurry to get at those fondants, *this* horror would never have happened. I was punished. God, as usual, was watching, and had judged. So now I was the centre of attraction. The ladies stared and smiled at me, and at each other, which served in no way to lessen my disgrace. These ladies were not greedy; they didn't push themselves forward to grab at pink fondants and upset a gentleman's wine. No. They sat, well-behaved at little round tables placed for that purpose, and waited in patience till their fondants and ices were brought. But *I* couldn't wait—I must push; I must grab. . . . I heard whispers:

"That's the youngest, I suppose."

"He married again, didn't he?"

"Yes—the governess."

"What a funny-looking child."

Funny-looking. I daresay. You'd look funny too if you had a glass of wine down your neck. A drop trickled on to my lips; I licked it off, and tasted something like ginger-beer that had gone sour. My chin began to shake. I swallowed a stone that was stuck in my throat and looked up at him whose wine I had spilt, and found he was looking at me.

"It's lucky to spill champagne," said he, very quick, "especially if one does *this*—" and he dabbed a finger to a trickle on my cheek, and touched me behind each ear. I giggled and squirmed, and then we both laughed, and the lumpy stone melted away.

Taking out his handkerchief he dried me, talking all the time: "Dear me! You *are* wet—but you won't catch cold. It's like sea water, only it tastes nicer. Have you ever tasted sea water?"

I told him I had when I went bathing. And from that we got to talking about the seaside, and how I had learned to swim last year, at a place called Combe Martin in Devonshire, which he said he knew, and then he asked my name, and I told him.

"But they call me Jenny for short."

Then one of the footmen refilled his glass from a bottle wrapped round in gold paper. "Here you are, Jenny-for-short," and he held the glass to my lips. "Take a sip, shut your eyes and wish."

I tried to do all three at once, and wished very hard that I might be allowed to stay up till eleven, instead of till ten, and found my mouth full of pins and needles. I spluttered, "It pricks—I don't like it."

He laughed again at that. "To tell you the truth, nor do I." But he drank the whole lot all the same.

I compared him, not unfavourably, with Mr Titterton. True, he was by no means elegant or dashing, nor was he tall like Mr Titterton, with broad shoulders and a waist and narrow hips. He was, in fact, rather plump, and his clothes looked as though they needed a good brushing; his hair too, which was not sleek or shiny, but a mop on his head, the same colour as the lions at the Zoo. He had a round rosy face, and little eyes like sherry wine that crinkled when he laughed till they almost disappeared behind his cheeks. I thought him very friendly.

He said, "What *do* you like, Jenny-for-short? Lemonade, ginger-beer, claret-cup—that's a bit strong for you, I think, eh? or——"

"This," said Mr Titterton, producing my strawberry ice. "Hullo, Charles! Are you cutting me out?"

Well content with my ice, I paid little heed to their talk as I stood between them, until I heard Hugh saying "Egypt——" and up went my ears, for I had just come to Egypt on the globes with Miss Sharp.

"We've had our orders," Hugh said, "but there's a likelihood they may be cancelled any minute and we'll be sent to Afghanistan instead. That trouble's not over yet."

"Empire building," said Charles. "Chasing niggers. Fine sport, I call that."

"You can call it what you like," retorted Hugh, "the fact remains that they've slaughtered fifteen hundred of our men—to say nothing of our prestige."

"It don't look too well for our prestige," observed Charles, "if fellers like Buller and Chelmsford and Wolsey and Wood can't settle Cetewayo's hash."

"He's got about a hundred thousand tribesmen at his heels, don't forget."

"Yes, and if we hadn't sent missionaries out to try and make

'em Christians we shouldn't be in the mess we are now."

"You're talking through your hat," said Hugh. "This war has nothing to do with missionaries."

"Hasn't it? How would you like to be told how to live, or to think—if you ever do—by a horde of grinning blacks? How would you like to be made to wear a loin-cloth instead of your guardee's uniform? It's as rough on them to have to wear clothes, as it would be for you to shave your moustache."

Hugh reddened. "I don't propose to argue——" but he sounded very much as if he did. "I should think any halfwit could see it goes deeper than that."

"What, your moustache?" grinned Charles. "Yes, it's comin' on a treat."

"Don't you understand," Hugh was getting angry, "that we can't kow-tow to these blacks every time they yell for their rights? They *have* no rights. They're savages."

"That's as maybe. I've always thought the Zulu a particularly fine type of savage myself. I can't see why physical perfection should be limited to the Hellenic ideal of beauty—such as yours, for instance," said Charles, in his teasing voice.

"Do you never talk sense?" asked Hugh, getting angrier.

"Only in my sleep," Charles told him, "in my dreams. Do you know there's a lot to be said for dreams? I've a theory about dreams. I believe they mean something more than meets the eye. I believe that underneath all this"—he gave a tweak to Hugh's moustache—"and this"—he tapped Hugh's immaculate shirt-front—"one might uncover sewers of filthy desires which you allow to run riot only in your dreams, and even then they're disguised. Take yourself, for instance——"

"What," interrupted Hugh, glaring, "has all this got to do with Zulus?"

"Indirectly—quite a lot. The desire for power—disguised, of course, as patriotism, Imperialism, or whatever you like to call it—plus fifty per cent racial antipathy, might account for the asinine way we go chasing after niggers and calling them the White Man's Burden when we've caught 'em. We're a something-or-other race of hypocrites," said Charles. "But that's because none of us know *where* we are—or *who* we are."

"If that's all you've learned at your bone-sawing," said Hugh, "then the sooner you get down to a job of work, the better."

"I admit," Charles sounded apologetic, "that I haven't got it straight yet. It's only an idea."

"It's an idea," remarked Hugh, shooting his cuffs, "that might land you in Colney Hatch if you're not careful." And taking his programme from his waistcoat pocket, he glanced at it. "I'm engaged for this dance, I must go." And he took himself off.

This conversation, though it conveyed no sense to me at the time, must have stayed in some corner of memory, for I hear it now as I heard it then . . . only now I understand. And although they seemed so old to me, these two were very young: Hugh, recently passed out of Sandhurst, and Charles, his cousin, just down from Cambridge, and 'walking the hospital,' Guy's: he who was to follow up that first pre-Freudian inception of what was 'only an idea,' and for which, in after years, he received no recognition. The mind of medicine was not prepared for what Charles Mallett in his lifetime had to give, though much of it to-day is now a jargon in the mouths of babes.

The room had emptied, the couples returned to the dance. Only Charles and I were left at the buffet.

"Jenny!" Belle's voice again: she stood in the doorway beckoning. I swallowed my last melting spoonful of ice and my heart sank as lead to my slippers. The clock struck the hour of my doom, and Belle had been sent to fetch me. "Come along," she hissed, then seeing Charles she said, "Not dancing this, Mr Mallett? Can I introduce you to a partner?"

"Thank you, Miss Drew, I have a partner—here. Your sister and I," Belle's eyebrows went up, "are sitting—no—standing it out."

"I see," Belle tinkled a laugh, but she looked, I thought, not very pleased.

"Must I go to bed, Belle?" I whispered.

"Not yet." Belle drew me aside, dropping her voice to say what she had to tell me. I was to bring Aunt Rosie down-stairs, and seat her at one of the tables in the dining-room—the one over there behind the palm, where she would not be noticed, and I was to keep her amused. I could if I liked fetch a pack of cards from the bureau drawer, and let Aunt Rosie tell fortunes, or we could play Old Maid and Beggar-my-Neighbour, but not Snap on account of the noise. And I was not to let Aunt Rosie talk to a soul. Did I understand?

I did: even I knew that it would never do for Aunt Rosie to say before company where it was that she wanted to go.

"But what about Papa?" For I had my orders and his word was law.

"I've arranged all that. Papa says you may stay up another hour—or until Aunt Rosie and Grandpapa go home."

Another hour! So my wish had come true.

"And when they go, Nurse will come and fetch you."

Still—another hour.

"And don't eat too much and make yourself sick." And she hurried away.

I was about to follow her, when Charles called after me, "May I have the pleasure, Jenny-for-short?"

"Pleasure of what?" I asked.

"Of this dance." And he bowed, heels together, very polite, though I had an idea he was teasing.

I thanked him very much. "I would like to," I said, "but I can't."

"Can't dance? No more can I, but you can hop, so may I have the pleasure of a hop?"

Oh, dear!

"It's not that I can't dance," I explained, "I know the steps of the quadrille, and I can do the polka—and it's not that I don't *want* to dance with you," I told him earnestly. "I hope you don't think that."

He assured me that he didn't.

"But—you see—I have to take care of Aunt Rosie."

"Can't Aunt Rosie take care of herself?"

"Not altogether." He was so very friendly that I found I could talk to him almost as if he were Mimi. "She might say things if I'm not there to stop her."

"What sort of things?"

I pleaded a fold of my muslin and felt my ears go hot, for however friendly Charles might be I couldn't tell him *that*.

"Suppose," said Charles, after a pause, while I felt my ears go hotter, "suppose we *both* take care of Aunt Rosie."

"Thank you," I said hastily. "No, that wouldn't do at all. She's not allowed to talk. She mustn't talk to a soul. And if I *do* let her talk to—anyone—I shall be sent to bed."

"It sounds very rum to me," said Charles. "Why should you be sent to bed?"

Why indeed?

"How old are you—eight?"

"Eight?" I was shocked. "I'm not *eight*. I'm eleven—next March." For it seemed to sound older that way.

"And I'm twice eleven next March," said Charles.

"Twice? Oh, both of us March. That's funny."

"You're funny," said Charles.

"Do you mean funny-looking?" I asked with suspicion.

"No, not funny-looking. Just funny."

I couldn't help thinking that Charles was, too, just a little bit funny, himself.

I found Aunt Rosie in the doorway of the ball-room, still watching the dancers and smiling, and holding Grandpapa's hand while he talked to Papa. The band was playing the 'Blue Danube,' and I wished that Mimi were here to show how it should be danced.

"You ought to be in bed," Papa said when he saw me.

"Yes, I know, but Belle——"

Papa waved his hand and was gracious. "Yes, yes. Run along and take your Aunt with you."

"I've got a stomach-ache," Aunt Rosie said, loud.

"Will you do as you are bid?" Papa turned to me in a hurry.

"Now, Rosie, you are to go downstairs with Jenny."

He spoke to Aunt Rosie exactly as though she were me.

Obediently Aunt Rosie took her hand from Grandpapa's and put it into mine, and we went downstairs together. There was no one in the dining-room but Charles, still standing at the buffet, eating sandwiches.

"I want something to eat," said Aunt Rosie.

"Yes, so do I, only ——" I tugged at her large white-gloved hand. "Let's come and sit over here."

Standing stock still in the middle of the room she said, "I'm undone at the back."

I squeezed her large podgy hand. "No, you're not."

"I tell you I'm undone at the back," she insisted. "It's my placket. Someone's undone my placket. One of the men, I expect." And she giggled. "Look behind and see."

I looked behind. "It's not undone now," I assured her, and to take her mind off her placket I said, "What a nice smell, Aunt Rosie." For as usual she reeked of scent.

"Jockey Club," stated Aunt Rosie. "I bought a new bottle to-day. Do you like it? I'll give it you if you like it."

She would give you anything she possessed, poor dear, if she thought you liked it.

"I want an ice and smoked salmon and chicken and ham and a glass of champagne," said Aunt Rosie, and she pointed to Charles. "What's he eating?"

"I'll go and ask him." I half-dragged and half-led her to a table behind a palm, and sat her in a chair.

Aunt Rosie put her face close to mine, and breathed hard. "What do I smell of now?"

"Onions," I told her, backing.

She nodded. "Irish stew. We had it for lunch. Is it strong?"

It was pretty strong.

"I thought so." And lifting her skirt, Aunt Rosie began to search in her petticoat pocket, showing a good deal of fat leg, encased in a white spun-silk stocking. I glanced round to see if Charles and the footmen were looking, but nobody was.

I prodded her shoulder. "Aunt Rosie—*please*. You can't do that here."

"Can't I? I must find my cachous."

"Oh dear, must you?" For she was lifting her skirt almost up to her knees, and making me very ashamed. After much fumbling, Aunt Rosie found her cachous—in a little silver box—from which she took several to cram in her mouth, and the rest of them into mine.

"I'll get a pack of cards," I said, scrunching violets, "and then you can tell fortunes."

That pleased her: so I fetched the cards from the bureau drawer, and left her to shuffle them while I went to the buffet. Charles had finished his sandwich, and he helped me choose things for Aunt Rosie, a plate of chicken and ham, and a helping of pudding that looked like a thick mass of worms and which tasted of chestnuts—I tried it to see—and two lemon ices, one for myself as a change from the strawberry, and a glass of champagne. All of which were brought to our table by one of the footmen and Charles.

"Thank you very much. We can manage nicely now," I told Charles as a hint he should go.

But—"May I sit here?" asked Charles, and sat; and as though he read my thoughts he said. "You needn't mind me, you know, I'm only the odd man out."

"It's not I who mind," I said, "it's Belle. You'll have to explain to her."

He looked at me with a laugh at the back of his eyes. "You eat up your ice, Jenny-for-short—or would you like me to eat it for you?"

After that we were very familiar, and although couples strayed in and out of the room, and gentlemen stood at the buffet, nobody

came to interrupt us or to send me to bed. When we had eaten enough—or rather when Aunt Rosie had eaten enough, for I could have eaten twice as much as the helpings Charles gave me—he called one of the footmen to clear the plates away, and we played Old Maid. Aunt Rosie laughed till she cried when she was Old Maid. “The cards never lie,” she said, “I *am* an old maid, but I needn’t have been. I had plenty of offers.” Indeed the poor soul did believe so. “Written ones, too. Take my advice.” She tapped Charles with her fan. “Never put offers of marriage in writing or you might land yourself in a mess. Breach of promise. My Pa’s a lawyer so I ought to know. I shall have to go upst——”

“Aunt Rosie,” I said, very quick, “won’t you please tell us our fortunes?”

“Yes, I must take off my gloves.” So she took off her gloves and showed Charles her rings. “These belonged to Poor Ma. All but this one. Never-Mind-Who gave me this one. That was *before*,” and she nodded very knowingly, “*before* I had the fever. When I had the fever I lost everything. My hair and my intended—I’ve never been the same. Never quite—you know. It’s my inside. I think I’d like another glass of wine. Here!” She called the footman. “I’ll have some more champagne. He’s hired,” Aunt Rosie said, while the footman poured the wine. “My brother don’t keep a manservant, but he likes peoples to think he does. My Pa keeps a butler and carriage and pair. Have you a Ma and a Pa?”

Charles said he had a Pa but his Ma was dead. “So is mine,” said Aunt Rosie. “So is Jenny’s. I didn’t like *her*—and she didn’t like me. I knew too much about her. I know what I know, but I’m not going to tell. I never have told, but I know—and I *think*——” Aunt Rosie leaned forward to tap Charles again, “I think that my brother knows too. If he don’t he ought to. This one’s no more like *him* than the cat.”

And Aunt Rosie laughed again until the tears ran down her cheeks, and that set me off laughing, and then Charles joined in—and there we were, the three of us, with aching sides. “Oh dear!” I wiped my eyes. “Now let’s tell fortunes.”

Aunt Rosie drank her champagne and shuffled the cards and held them out to me. “Jenny first. Cut.”

I cut, and Aunt Rosie laid them out in rows.

“Three’s turn up—three men in your life, and here’s your marriage, and here are you—looking towards sorrow. A bad lay-out with the death-card to——”

The table jerked suddenly, as Charles moved his knee and upset the cards on the floor. "That's bad luck," said Aunt Rosie severely.

"No, it's not," said Charles. "That's good luck, that is, and anyhow you can't count that fortune, because here—look," and he stooped, "you dropped some cards out when you shuffled."

"No, I didn't," said Aunt Rosie.

"Excuse me," said Charles, "but you did. Here—I'll tell Jenny's fortune."

And he dealt out the cards in a row. I held my breath watching. "By Jove, here's luck if you like. You're going to a party——"

"I am at a party," I said.

"You're going to more—lots of parties. And let's see—here's something that looks like a present. Yes, you'll get a present, two presents. One big and one small."

"You're making it up," said Aunt Rosie. "The nine of spades is disappointment."

"Not the way I tell fortunes. Now, Aunt Rosie, you tell mine," and he handed her the cards. "Do I cut?"

"Yes, with the left hand away from your heart and wish." Aunt Rosie dealt the cards in the form of a star. "There's a disappointment. That nine comes up for both of you. And a time of waiting, but you'll get your wish. Marriage comes late. You'll never want for money. There's success to you in a high building——"

I wondered if Nurse would like some of that delicious 'worm' pudding. I knew she was upstairs with Martha. I might take them both some of the 'worm' pudding. I slid off my chair. "I'm going up to Nurse for a minute," I said, for with Charles to look after Aunt Rosie I felt that I might be spared. I went to the buffet and asked the footman who had brought the champagne for two helpings of pudding on separate plates and a little piece more for myself. He was very obliging.

I found Nurse with Martha in Belle's bedroom where the ladies had left their cloaks. Nurse said I ought to have been in bed long ago, and that she would have me feverish in the morning with all this excitement, but I took it she was pleased I had brought her the pudding.

Martha said, "Fancy her thinking of us, you know, all on her own, the dear. I must have a kiss for that, ducks."

I gave her a kiss, and she hugged me, and said that my eyes were too big for my face.

"And her heart's too big for her body," Nurse commented, with gloom.

Which to me sounded alarming. I suggested that perhaps the doctor might make it smaller. "Only I suppose he would have to cut me open to get at it—and then what would be likely to happen?"

Martha gave a squawk. "She'll make me die one of these days." And even Nurse permitted that relaxation of her upper jaw which on her face served as a smile.

"Nothing's likely to happen," she assured me. "it'll grow smaller and harder of its own accord as time goes on, so you won't need to go to the doctor." I looked from one to the other and nodded. "I see——" for I knew I was being laughed at. And I went away wondering why people never said what they meant when they talked to me or at me, but must always wrap everything up like they wrapped up a powder in jam. Yet you had the taste of the powder just the same—underneath. So that take it by and large you couldn't trust them.

Having come to this conclusion, which was no new thing to me but one over which I had frequently pondered, I ran downstairs, jumping the last three of each flight, except those where some couples were sitting, and over whom I stepped, begging their pardon. There were no more couples to step over once I had passed the conservatory landing, so I thought I would try to jump four. I jumped—and fell, and caught my head a great crack on the corner of the iron baluster. Pain, sharp and sudden, cut through me, and when I stood up I felt sick. Something sticky and warm crawled down my forehead and dripped on to my dress. I was bleeding. I had never bled like this before, not even from cut knees. . . . Knees oozed, they didn't drip . . . a bright red.

Holding my hand to my forehead I stumbled into the dining-room, and saw Charles and Aunt Rosie through a crimson fog. I heard voices far away, and a scream—I think from Aunt Rosie. I tried to tell her to sit down and not talk to a soul, but the words were a noise in my throat. The room spun, the lights blazed and dimmed, the floor heaved and came up to my chin. The last thing I remembered before all went dark was the face of Charles close to mine as he lifted me, and on his shirt-front a stain of bright red.

II

A HAZE obscures the years while memories fade and form again, as milestones along the way, to mark the slow transition from the child to the girl. Time flows uninterrupted, weaving its ordered pattern through a sequence of events, none outstanding, many trivial, yet each a thread in the main substance of my life.

I am in bed with a bandaged head. Nurse, a starched presence, looms large by my pillow, relieved at intervals by visits from the doctor, a red-handed Colossus, who says it won't hurt—I won't feel it. But I do feel it. I feel it every time he takes the bandage off, and puts it on: I grind my teeth and hold the water in my eyes, while Nurse shows me the pictures of wounded soldiers—with bandages on *their* heads—in the *Illustrated London News*, and tells me if I was out there fighting the Zulus I'd have worse to bear than this. I must think of it as if I'm one of Them.

I suffer and am proud—as one of Them.

Grandpapa comes with a large box of chocolates tied up in pink ribbon. Six layers. He strokes my cheek with a thin brittle finger, shakes his head at me and says, "A pretty kettle of fish"—and goes away.

Laura and Belle spend occasional half-hours at my bedside playing Happy Families, and Charles sends me Lear's *Book of Nonsense*. I write to thank him for:

"One of the presents the cards said I would have. My head is bandiged up I hope you are quite well as I am exsept for my head I like the one about the young Lady whoose Nose was so long that it reached to her Toes the best my stitchis are coming out tomorrow Thanking you very much with kind Regards" (which Nurse told me to put) "From Jennifer Drew."

Papa with his glass in his eye stands at the foot of my bed and says, "A nice thing, hey? A nice thing to be scarred for life. You'll be scarred for life. A fitting punishment. The Lord punishes naughty girls who behave like street-arabs—jumping downstairs.

You fell jumping downstairs. Didn't you?"

I nod, speechless. How does he know? He knows everything—even as the Lord.

"Will I look ugly, scarred for life?"

"*Vanitas Vanitatum*," returns Papa incomprehensibly. "There was once upon a time a toad—have you ever heard of the toad—the ugliest of all reptiles—who——"

"What," I dare to interrupt, "is a reptile?"

"What is a *reptile*? Do you mean to tell me you don't know?"

I do not.

"A reptile," Papa clears his throat to inform me, "is a loathsome creature. A crawling animal. A mean and grovelling person."

I shrink lower in my bed. I gaze at Papa, who smiles at me with a great show of teeth between his moustache and his beard. "To resume," says Papa, "this toad, this repulsively ugly creature, carried a jewel in its forehead. A precious and beautiful jewel—here," he taps his own forehead, "where you will carry for life the mark of your naughtiness. But *behind* that mark of your naughtiness, behind that hideous scar, there may yet shine forth the jewel of good behaviour and docility. Pray to God for guidance, for without God's guidance the jewel can never shine."

On which pronouncement he leaves me to ponder. . . . I am a reptile, a mean and grovelling person, scarred for life and hideous. A toad.

And I am better. Convalescent. I take my first airing with Nurse in the carriage, but my head is still bandaged under my hat, hiding the shame of my scar.

Life returns to norm and I to Miss Sharp and my lessons. I learn the piano. Miss Sharp sits beside me and counts One two and *Three* four. Miss Sharp balances a penny on my knuckles and tells me to hold my hand firm and steady, so that the penny cannot roll off. I learn my first piece, 'Home, Sweet Home,' and then promotion, 'The Blue Bells of Scotland.' Miss Sharp raps my knuckles with her pencil and shows me how it should be played, with fingers straight and rigid. I try again, but now I don't look at the music. I play the tune as I hear it, stiff-fingered.

"What are you doing?" Miss Sharp raps my knuckles so hard that I squeak. "That is not the right key. Don't tell me you are playing by ear."

I don't tell her I am playing by ear. I don't know I am playing by ear. I only know it is easier to play that way than to read notes. I am taken off the 'Blue Bells of Scotland,' and put back

to 'Home Sweet Home.' I hold my wrists tight and my knuckles so steady and my fingers so stiff that the penny stays balanced, but my teeth are on edge at the sounds that I make, and Miss Sharp tells Papa I have no taste for music. She considers it a waste of time to teach me. He hears me play and agrees. Thereafter no more music with Miss Sharp. . . .

Miss Sharp, Belle and Laura address invitations, while I stand by licking the stamps.

"Mr. Nicholas Drew requests the pleasure of your company at the wedding of his daughter Isabelle to Captain Guy Haddon."

Laura and I are bridesmaids. I walk in the bridal procession, paired with Captain Haddon's niece, May. We are identically dressed in white poplin, and hats trimmed with white ostrich feathers, and we carry bouquets of forget-me-nots. Coloured light from stained glass, purple, crimson and blue, falls soft on Belle's veiled head as she kneels with her uniformed bridegroom. There is an aching smell of lilies, a boy's voice high and clear, and the organ thundering the Wedding March, unaccountably to bring tears. Very shaming. We follow her out under an arch of crossed swords, and drive away in carriages to Grandpapa's house on the Bayswater Road which has been lent to us for the reception.

Belle, tall, lovely and white as a swan, stands with Captain Haddon in the middle of the room surrounded by bridesmaids and guests. There are speeches and toasts, and a chorus 'For they are jolly good fellows,' from Captain Haddon's fellows in the Buffs. Then Belle cuts the cake with a sword, and Captain Haddon's niece, May, and I, take a piece each and go to the closet together.

Captain Haddon's niece, May, shows me her drawers that have frills of valenciennes lace threaded with blue *bébé* ribbon. She asks to see mine which Nurse made me, and are depressingly plain for they have no lace, no *bébé* ribbon, and only one frill of embroidery and a band of feather-stitching round the top. I then show her the scar on my forehead under the fringe of hair Nurse has cut to hide it, and Captain Haddon's niece has nothing to offer in return for that but an inferior mole on her bottom.

Captain Haddon's niece asks me do I know what her uncle will do to my sister when they go to bed to-night? I say "No, what?" And she says, looking sly, "He will kiss her and give her a baby."

I am sceptical. I argue—if that were true everyone would have babies every time they were kissed. Captain Haddon's niece calls me a Softy, "Because," she assures me, "you have to be *married* before it can happen, and *then* only when you are kissed."

I waver but am determined not to be outdone. I hold a trump-card up my sleeve and throw it down with a flourish.

"My mother died before I was born——" at which Captain Haddon's niece, May, is pleased to scoff, "She couldn't have. Everybody has to have a mother. Even kittens have a mother when they're born."

I cannot but see the point of her argument: nevertheless I refuse to admit it, and improvise recklessly, "Kittens, yes—but people are different to kittens. Lots of people don't have any mothers at all. Very often a baby is found. Moses was found—in the bulrushes." (Captain Haddon's niece couldn't deny it.) "And I was found—by my father. In bed."

Which might, I reflect, account for his attitude towards me ever since, for it is likely I gave him a shock. But however that might be I have provided Captain Haddon's niece with food for thought, and am a little compensated for the lack of *bébé* ribbon on my drawers. And as we leave the closet, I turn to her and say, "So take it back—your calling me a Softy."

That impromptu explanation served to Captain Haddon's niece on the day of Belle's wedding may have filled in the gaps left by subsequent research. Nurse, Miss Sharp, Laura in turn were beleaguered, although the answers extracted only increased my suspicion of mystery, that must not yet be revealed, but would, maybe, unfold as I grew. And I was late in growing.

I became dimly aware of a change in myself, a subtle tension, a queer inflowing sense of expectancy as I waited for something, I knew not what, to happen. I went unguided through the maze of adolescence, filled with strange bewildering desires, perplexed, tormented by a shadow self that dwelled beside me, sometimes frightening, sometimes warm and friendly, but always unsubstantial as a dream. Conforming outwardly to pattern, none guessed what volcanic upheavals swelled in those small flattened breasts under a petticoat bodice. I remember how often I experienced the oddest sensation of being 'outside' of myself. At such times smallest things of sight and sound were multiplied, sense quickened, and suddenly it seemed I was divided. Jenny, her hands, her face—which just for reassurance I would touch—

were solid enough and familiar, yet all I knew of Me had gone, dissolved, leaving a stranger in possession.

This Jennifer Drew, so called, who wore my clothes, inhabited my body—this my double, who was she that opened magically my eyes to new perception? She, who saw, as never surely had I seen on some spring morning, such a miracle of loveliness—a tree. A poplar, tall and straight and sooty-stemmed, in Mimi's garden, lit over with green flame that flickered jets of silver to the wind; or an outflung branch of blossom, white as lace and whiter than the wild March sky. And then the April rain, with a blueness shining through, and the gold bells of daffodils beside Sir Joshua's hutch. But the hutch was empty, Sir Joshua dead, and Mouzel, where was he?

So softly they faded, these childish things, one scarcely knew that they were gone until one missed them. . . .

Or I would listen through a silence for a song; Mitzi singing clear and sweet on a day without sun; or a blackbird in the lilac bush behind the dark-house, and there would be a sadness in a pigeon's coo—*take two-oo*—and on the trellis top a flight, a flutter, and dainty bow and peck of grey bird preening . . . and the long emptiness of Mimi's garden.

For Mimi too was gone—to school in Paris. Not boarding-school but ballet-school, and she lived with her aunt, Mitzi's sister. She wrote to me in a large untidy scrawl:

"It is heaven here. I speak French and think in French too. If only you were here you would adore it. I am at the school all day and am taught by a maître and maîtresse de ballet. The maître is an Italian and very old. He knew Talligionie (I don't think I've spelt it right). She was a great dancer about 40 years ago. I read everything I can about ballet, and I cannot describe to you how hard we work. It is not all pleasure to be a dancer. My mussels ache so much sometimes that I cry with the pain. And yet there is no joy in the world better than dancing. But I am not allowed to make up dances like I used to. We have a corps de ballet, and each one of us is première danseuse in turn. My turn comes not more than once a month. Signor Balbo tells me I must work at my exercises until my legs, my hands, my feet are soldiers, and my brain the general in command to say *Hola*, Now stand on my shoulder. Then my foot stands on my shoulder. Yes I can do that now, and the mussels of my legs feel like bands

of iron. I became a young lady last Sunday. Do you know what I mean? And are you?" . . .

I was not. Nor had I notion what Mimi could mean, but I knew that I ought to be envious, and I might have been too, if it were not for the secret I shared with myself and which was all part of 'outsideness.' Sometimes so overwhelming would be this strange spell—it only happened when I was alone—that I must speak aloud or stamp my foot, or call for Nurse, or run scared to the kitchen and wheedle a cake out of Cook, and so break the enchantment. Or at such moments I would steal from my basement and climb the stairs until I reached the heights of Laura's territory, the drawing-room.

Having made certain that neither my sister nor Papa were at home, I would close the door softly and then—I would open the lid of the Steinway.

It stood at an angle between the two windows, its lovely ebony body draped in a kind of pink shawl, and littered with photographs in silver frames and Dresden figures and knick-knacks and goodness knows what. But there it was, and there stood I, with my heart beating up in my throat and the Stranger in possession, to bid me sit and touch the keys. Only to touch. That was all I dared at first—to touch that I might hear a whisper from the notes. And presently, grown bolder, I would hear those same notes sing and answer as I dared to play my thoughts. I played the song of Mitzi, and colours in the sky, or a spray of almond blossom, or Mimi dancing the 'Blue Danube.' Yes, I found I could play that by humming under my breath the tune while Mimi danced, a small red ghost in memory. But my fingers—my poor tight stiffened fingers would not obey my thoughts. My fingers must be soldiers, like Mimi's legs—my brain the general in command, and my fingers were wood, yes—wooden soldiers. Then the Stranger in myself would turn and mock me: *You* to play! *You* to think that you have music in your fingers. Look at them, feel them—they're like sticks. You don't even know your scales. You don't know what a crochet is, or quavers. You can't read a bar of anything with notes that go below the fifth line of the bass, or above it in the treble. You to play! . . . Until tormented with an agony of longing, I crash my fists upon the keys to make them screech, and take my knuckles to my teeth to bite in madness. . . . And I stare at the red bleeding mark on the back of my hand, and wonder what I can tell Nurse if she asks. And I

find a piece of sticking-plaster in a drawer to hide it, and I tell her that I scraped my knuckles on a nail. So now it seems I am a Liar too.

Then came the day. . . .

It must have been in winter, for I remember a dazzle in my eyes when Nurse pulled up the blinds to wake me. The roof tops were white, and thickly white the window-sill, and my breath rose like steam when I spoke.

"Is it snowing?"

"Not now, but it did in the night." Nurse dragged the hip-bath from the cupboard and dumped it in front of the fireless grate.

Whining, I snuggled deeper in the bedclothes. "It's so horribly cold. I don't want to get up. Can't I have the fire lit?"

"No you can't have the fire lit," returned Nurse in an echo of my whine. "There's more to do than wait on you, me lady." Nurse poured a steaming can of water in the bath. "So come on. Are you going to get up?"

I dragged the bed-clothes over my head and murmured something to effect that I felt sick.

"I'll give you sick." Nurse stripped the bed of its covers. "Now perhaps you'll feel sicker."

With chattering teeth, I allowed Nurse to bath me. Although almost fourteen I was still attended by Nurse as if I were four. Nurse was my slave and I knew it. Sour she might be, sharp as knives and bad-tempered, but I think all the love of her life went to me. In that house the only love I'd ever known.

"There's going to be some changes here," Nurse said between soapings. "Lord sakes, your ears! One could grow mustard and cress in 'em—and how do you think I can get you clean if you move your head away?"

"You hurt. Don't rub so hard. Let me——"

"Let you! I should say so."

Nurse squeezed soapy water out of the sponge over my face to rinse it.

I squealed. "It's in my eyes."

"Then you should shut them. Here's your towel."

"What do you mean by changes?" I inquired, while Nurse dried me. "What sort of changes?"

"I'm leavin'." And Nurse closed her mouth like a trap.

"Leaving?" I stared at her. "Leaving me? No!" I wriggled from under her hands and flung myself upon her. "You're not.

You can't be leaving me. Why? Who says you're to leave? I won't have you leave. I won't have it. You can't——"

"Now, now," Nurse disengaged from my clutches. "Put some clothes on. Don't dance about naked."

"But you're not—say you're not going. You were teasing, weren't you? Weren't you?" I was at her again.

Said Nurse: "Put on your vest and your stockings. Have you no shame of yourself?"

I put on my vest and my stockings, and stood, while Nurse buttoned me into my petticoats, and my everyday frock of blue serge.

"You'd better look sharp, or your Pa'll be waiting."

Since my thirteenth birthday I had been promoted to breakfast with my father and Laura and I dared not be one minute late, but—"I'll not move from this room till you tell me," I said. "Is it true? Are you going?" And a great fear came upon me. "It's not true. Say it's not true. I can't bear it. I won't have you go."

"Ho! So you'll miss the old woman," remarked Nurse with her sniff.

I stroked her, and swallowed. "You're not old."

"I'm sixty," said Nurse, "come September. It's time I retired. I've been told so—or as good."

"By Papa, I suppose." And I heard a great blast as of wind in my ears: something snapped. I cried, loud: "I won't have it. He can't do this to me—he can't. He won't. I'll tell him. I hate him—I *hate*——"

It was out. The furtive resentment of years, a cauldron of blackness within me, had seethed to its boiling pitch, and I felt a queer sense of elation.

"Stop it!" Nurse shook me. "Such wickedness. Are you crazy?"

I surely must have been.

"I didn't—it came. Forget—I never said it," I blubbered, with my knuckles in my eyes. "It's only—I can't bear it if you leave me."

"I'm not gone yet," said Nurse, "and I never would have told you if I'd thought you'd take on so."

"But why"—I asked again—"why are you going?"

Nurse shook her head and sighed, as she stooped, with a creaking of her stays, to take the towel from the floor.

"We'll be late for prayers," was all the answer I could get.

and late indeed we were. Papa, seated at the head of the table opposite Laura, gave me one look as he rose. Nurse went to the end of the room, where Cook, the four maids and the boot boy stood in line ready. I slunk to my place at the table. Papa focused his eyes again upon me, and lowered them to the open page of the prayer book.

All knelt. Papa read from the book. I covered my face and prayed: Don't let Nurse leave O God don't let him send her away. . . .

Tears wetted my hands. I peeped through my fingers and saw Papa's eyes between the jutting fortress of his nose; and I knew that those eyes saw my tears.

"Our Father," said Papa, "which art in Heaven hallowed by Thy name . . ."

"Thy Name," we all muttered.

"Thy Kingdom come."

"Kingdom come."

"Thy Will be done."

". . . Will be done."

Don't let him shout because I was late, I screamed in the dark of myself. Don't let him smile.

"And forgive us our trespasses."

"Trespasses . . ."

"For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power——" the word rolled from his lips round and full.

Don't let Nurse go, I shall die if she goes.

"And the Glory for ever and ever. . .

Amen."

Papa closed the prayer book. The staff filed out. Papa called after Nurse: "Wait."

She stood at the door with the knob in her hand, very starched, very red in the face, her mouth tight.

Papa lifted his glass to his eye.

"Are you or is Miss Jenny to blame for keeping prayers waiting five minutes?"

"I am to blame, sir."

He smiled.

"Indeed? And may I ask why you were late?"

"I must have overslept, sir, and that made me late with Miss Jenny."

My nails were stuck in my palms as I listened, for I knew that she lied for my sake.

"So! You over slept. Having been given your notice you would naturally become a little careless in the attention of your duties." Papa said, with silk. "That is to be expected. Having only one month more——" And the silk in his voice rasped as he stressed it—"Barely one month more—or if you care to make it one *day* more of service in this household, that is immaterial to me. Your wages will be paid——"

"No, Papa!" The scream that was hid in my darkness broke into frenzy beyond me. "Don't send her away. Don't send her—oh, please——"

I stopped. He was smiling. His white beautiful teeth between the golden-brown beard and moustache, seemed to stretch as though pulled by elastic.

"You—hold your tongue—or I may have to thrash you."

Often he threatened to thrash me, but he had never done so yet. There were times when I wished that he would. No thrashing could have stung as did his smile, and those chill glassy looks that he gave me. He again addressed Nurse. "As for you—you may go. I will deal with you later."

"Yes, sir," said Nurse, clear. "But before I go I must warn you that Miss Jenny is not at all well to-day. She can't stand an upset."

"Can she not?" A vein like a cord stood out on his forehead. "So you give me my orders?" His monocle dropped. He shouted: "Go! Leave the room."

Nurse left it. I stood in my place, and slithered down again, clutching the sides of my chair. "Papa, is it true—is Nurse really going?"

Laura's raised brows sent me a warning, but I blundered heedlessly on. "Is it true? I don't want her to go. *Must* she go? Papa——" I tried to hold my voice steady. "Would you please tell me—is there a reason? Please tell me."

"Still talking?" Papa opened the *Times*, scanned the headlines and laid it aside. "And why, may I ask, should I account to you for the way I choose to conduct my own household, or dismiss my own servants? However, since you seem bent on an answer—Laura!—my cup, if you please."

Laura passed his cap to me: I passed it on.

"Yes, Nurse is leaving. It is preposterous that a girl of your age, seemingly in full possession of her faculties, who is not, one supposes, mentally deficient, should be nursed and coddled as this woman coddles you—and *has* coddled you ever since you

were born. She coddles and spoils you—waits on you hand and foot, defies my authority—I will not have——” The vein on his forehead pulsed: he banged his fist on the table till the crockery jumped to spill his coffee in the saucer. “I will not have defiance in my house. She defies me, as you, her pawn, defy me. She undermines my influence. She has been here too long—a dependent in my house, taking my wages, and eating her head off in the non-fulfilment of her duties. Laura’s maid will attend you in future. Eat your porridge.”

It was so typical of him, this outburst, that petered into nothing at the end. He would shout and glare and threaten, but before the worst had happened it was over, and you were left to wonder why you feared him. For what was he after all? A big man with a beard, who said everything twice, and having said all had said nothing: a man who had never been young, and yet was younger than I who had given up childish things. Even then I must have dimly recognized behind his bluster the game of make-believe he played within himself.

I glanced at Laura. Did she ache as I did at this news? Nurse had been in Laura’s life longer than in mine. But Laura was reading a letter, and I could not see her eyes, or know her thoughts, for they were screened behind her lowered lids.

Papa ate his bacon and eggs. His beard moved up and down in slow mastication thirty-four (or was it forty-two?) times, as prescribed by Mr Gladstone, for whom, notwithstanding his mistrust of Home Rule, Papa had a sneaking regard. My father’s political opinions must, I think, have been uncomfortably divided between the Devil—as represented by that wily old Jew and his works—and the Deep Sea of the Irish Channel.

I dabbled my spoon in my porridge, and watched Laura reading her letter. Its envelope marked O.H.M.S. lay on the floor. I picked it up and laid it beside her plate. I knew who had written that letter. Laura was engaged to Captain Woodstock, whom she would marry as soon as he came home on leave. He was in the Sudan with his regiment and had been in action at Tel-el-Kebir. But now unless any further trouble occurred he would come back and take Laura away.

Since Belle’s marriage I had come to know Laura better—or it might be because I was older, that she talked to me sometimes as though I were almost her age. She would let me come into her room to sit on the bed and watch when she dressed for a party, or she would take me out

shopping or for drives in the carriage when she went to pay calls, or leave cards.

She was nearing the end of her letter; her bodice stirred with her breathing as her eyes followed the written lines across and down the page. Then she folded her letter and slipped it in her pocket, and took some toast and buttered it, but did not eat.

Papa looked up.

"Is your letter from Harry?"

"Yes, Papa."

"What does he say?"

Some colour crept into her cheeks.

"Not very much, Papa. I am afraid the regiment will be kept there some time yet, but he thinks he will get leave next month."

"Next month! And then I suppose you will rush to be married."

Laura lifted her chin.

"I shan't rush, Papa, but I hope to be married. He does not expect to have more than three weeks' leave."

"He will be lucky to have that. If you ever read your paper you would know that the state of affairs in Egypt at the present time is extremely grave. I should hardly have thought that a British officer, holding a position there—*any* position of responsibility—could be given three weeks' leave at such a time as this, to come home and be married."

"His leave was cancelled, you remember, Papa, when the regiment went out."

"All leave," said Papa, "is cancelled, and always *is* cancelled, when a regiment goes out. There is nothing singular in that. But there is something singular—ominously singular—or so it seems to me, in granting leave to an officer whose regiment may at any moment be flung into fresh encounter with that madman and his dancing Dervishes."

By that 'madman' Papa meant the Mahdi, whom even I knew had caused enough trouble among the Egyptians and Arabs, and would no doubt very shortly cause more.

"I suppose," Papa resumed with a smile, "that he has not by any chance been—cashiered?"

"Papa!" Laura sprang to her feet, a red flag in each cheek. "If Harry were here he would know how to deal with —"

Papa looked at her over his paper. "Pray, my dear, don't be hysterical."

"I am not in the least hysterical."

I marvelled at her courage, though to be sure such defiance

from my sister to her parent was no great surprise to me. She could dare where I dared not. Perhaps when I was her age I, too, might speak my mind.

"So you intend," Papa said, "to be married next month. You know what is said about marriage in haste?"

"There will be no haste about my marriage. I have been engaged two years. I should like to be married as quietly as possible. I don't want a large reception. I want——"

"A pauper's wedding, in fact," Papa interrupted. "Very well, you shall have it. You shall be married *as* a pauper *to* a pauper. You know my views on this engagement. It has never met with my approval. He may be the heir to a baronetcy but he will get nothing from his uncle but the title. The estate is not entailed. You are marrying a pauper with nothing but his pay, and that is not going to keep you. Nor am I."

"We shall manage," Laura said. "I don't mind being poor."

"If so, you are a fool." Papa drank the last of his coffee, wiped his moustache with his napkin and passed his empty cup, which Laura, still standing, refilled.

"I don't say *marry* money," Papa took the cup from me, "but I do say, marry where money is—or will be. There'll be none here. Your sister had more sense. Guy will come in for something more substantial than a handle to his name. However, as you make your bed, so must you lie on it. I have no power to forbid this marriage. You are not a minor—pass the sugar."

I passed the sugar.

"And you might not have another chance. You are four—or is it five-and-twenty? I do not relish the idea of a spinster daughter on my hands for life. A misfortune," he glanced at me, "which I may yet have to meet. Why have you not eaten your breakfast?" This query addressed not to me but to my porringer, caused me hurriedly to convey a spoonful of the now congealed mess to my mouth.

"Would you kindly excuse me, Papa?" said Laura at the door, "I have an appointment with the hairdresser at ten o'clock."

"Oho!" Papa smiled very affably indeed. "An appointment with the hairdresser at ten o'clock. And who will pay for appointments with the hairdresser when you are married? Captain Woodstock? That is about all he will pay for. How far do you suppose a captain's pittance will go towards the upkeep of your fal-lals, and your dress, to say nothing of a house? You will be a hack——" Papa began to shout "—a garrison hack. Living

in furnished rooms, two at most, in Aldershot or some such hole. But if you think that *I'll* support you—you're mistaken. You will get two thousand for your dowry, and not a penny more."

She faced him with clear eyes.

"Have I asked you for a penny more? I don't want that."

He took up the *Times*. "You'll be glad enough to have it. You may go."

The door closed with no sound as she went.

The cold porridge stuck in my throat. Papa, wrapped in his paper, was hidden. I was safe from his observance. I had discovered a way of dealing with uneaten breakfast. Scooping up what was left of my porridge I put it all in a saucer, and stealthily laid the saucer on the footstool under the table. Then, having finished my cup of tea-flavoured milk, I asked, "Papa, may I please leave the table?"

Over the *Times* he glanced at me and at my porridgeless porringer, and replied, "Have you eaten your egg?"

I nodded, crossed my fingers, and said 'Not' to myself and to God.

"You look peaked," Papa told me severely. "I shall order you cod liver oil. Say your grace."

I said my grace.

"Come here."

Quaking, I went to his side.

"Understand. I will have no defiance. I will have no questioning of what I do or do not do. Your nurse is leaving because——" Papa cleared his throat, and glanced away from my eyes, "because I must make fresh arrangements, of which you will be told in good time. Nurse made some remark about your health just now. Do you feel ill? You look ill. As yellow as a guinea. Bilious. Are you bilious?"

"No, Papa."

"Have you a cold?"

"No, Papa."

He brushed back the fringe of hair on my forehead, to lay his large soft hand upon it, remarking, "That scar is a shocking disfigurement. No, you are not feverish. But you may be excused your lessons with Miss Sharp to-day."

"It is Saturday, Papa. I only have drawing on Saturday. Miss Sharp doesn't come till eleven."

"Then when she comes you may be excused your drawing, and go for a brisk walk in Kensington Gardens. See

that you wear goloshes; there is snow on the ground."

"Thank you, Papa."

He returned to his paper and I left the room. This solicitude for my welfare was no new thing to me; he continually pestered Nurse about my condition, ordered patent medicines, and James' powders and, I think, worried himself enough over my childish ailments, for I was never robust. He was strictly conscientious. I am certain, too, that in his fashion he did love me, with a love that had no power to beget.

I rushed down at once to the nursery. Nurse was turning out the cupboard where my toys were kept. "Half of these," she said, "are broken. Look at these dolls." She held out two decapitated objects. "I've found the heads and I can stick 'em on, and we can send them to the children's 'orspital with anything else you don't want."

"Send them all—I hate them. I hate everything!" I threw myself upon her, in a storm of tearless sobs. She sat down in her chair by the fire and took me on her lap, as never had she done since I was small. And with her arms about me, and with my head on her starched bosom, I was comforted. The dreadful shaking of my body turned to hiccups. "It won't be so bad as you think," she said. "It had to come some time—see? You're a big girl now. You must learn to stand on your own feet."

"Where are you going? You won't go to another girl, will you? You won't be another girl's nurse?"

She answered was it likely?—stroking back my hair. No, she was going to live with Phœbe, whose husband was lodge-keeper at Crowthorpe Hall, Belle's father-in-law's place in Sussex. She would be ever so happy in the country, with nothing to do and no naughty girls—her arms tightened round me—to fetch and carry for. It was Belle who had got Phœbe's husband the job when he came back wounded from the Zulu war, and living there Nurse would often see Belle and hear news of me, and I might be brought down from time to time to see her. And I was not to upset myself any more about it, but to get up off her lap as she had all her ironing to do, and half-past nine already. "So go and wash your face, You look a sight."

I washed in Hood's pantry to save myself the risk of encountering Papa on the way upstairs. I told Hood to look for my bowl of porridge on the footstool, and she said that was twice in a week and she'd have to tell the master. But I knew she never would.

Through the pantry window which was open at the top. I heard the sound of music from the room in the house at the back. It was Mike playing the first movement of his concerto.

I have never understood why Michael O'Connor with that score to his credit, should have died as he lived, unknown. It is not a great work but it has great quality, and though it never touches the heights or depths it does express the mysticism and haunting loveliness of the Irish folk songs on which the theme is based. I may be biased, and am certainly no critic, for at a time when all the world of music was thunderstruck by Wagner, I stayed unstirred. I did not understand it, and what I cannot understand, I cannot love. But I understood the music Mike was playing on that snowy morning almost sixty years ago. It called to me in colours: I felt music that way, and do still. The whole tone of Mike's concerto is green and grey, and softly blue as his Irish mountains, with sometimes a flash of scarlet like a peasant's cloak beside the silent waters of his lakes. Of course I did not know then that his music spoke of Ireland, but I knew it was sad and gay: sad with the sound of a hollow moon, and gay with the wind's wild laughter. And I knew that it spoke of these secret things that can never be put into words.

I looked out of the window and saw the snow in our square of back-yard, sooty white and marked only by the footprints of cats. Hood had gone upstairs to clear away. Nurse was busy with my cupboard. I might take a chance.

Noiselessly unlatching the back-door I crept out. One hurried glance through the nursery window showed me nothing of Nurse but her behind as she stooped. I did not now need a chair to climb over the wall. I clambered up, wriggled through the gap in the trellis and slid down. My feet, in their thin house slippers, squelched in the snow as I ran. The O'Connors' back-door was ajar; I went in, scraped my shoes on the mat, and felt the wet soaking through my stockings. Mitzi was not in the kitchen. I guessed she was out giving lessons. The O'Connors kept no maid—a woman came, I believe, two hours a day to do the chores—and Mitzi did the cooking.

Mike was still playing. I ran upstairs and stood listening outside the room, then I soundlessly opened the door. Mike, lost in his music, neither saw nor heard me . . . yet I can see him now as he sat with his profile outlined against the window; that sharp-edged jaw, the high cheek-bones, and the dark thickness of his hair, stiff on his head like a brush. He came to the

end with a crash of strange chords and stayed his hands on the keys and sat still, his chin lowered. I cried out, "Don't stop! Play again."

Mike's head went up as though pulled by a wire; under the shelves of his eyebrows, his eyes peered and blinked. "Is it yourself or a ghost that ye are? How long have you been standin' there and me not seein' ye at all?"

"About five minutes. I was in the pantry. I heard you playing——"

My chin began to shake. I dug my teeth in my lip and stared at him who stared at me with every expression save that of wonder gone from his face. It must have been six months since I had last visited the house at the back. Six months at least since Mimi went away.

His survey having assured him that my appearance in his room denoted nothing extramundane—"Did ye like what I was playin'?" Mike demanded: and not waiting for an answer, "me hands are cold," he said, "I was playing like suffering cats." Then he started up and pointed a finger at my feet. "Look!" he shouted, "will ye look now? It's ye're death ye'll be catching in those shoes. They're wringing wet. Look at um!"

I looked, and mumbled that I'd wiped them on the mat as I came in.

"And ye ruinin' the rug—me one Bokhara," Mike went on as though he hadn't heard. "Makin' puddles on it. Take your shoes off and your stockings."

The shake in my chin turned to a giggle. Mike could shout and yell worse than Papa, but when he yelled he was funny, not fearful.

"Now wait till I find ye a pair of Mimi's to put on while they're drying," said Mike. "Go and sit over there by the fire." He dashed out of the room, and I heard a great noise of shutting and opening drawers, and banging of cupboards, and swearing. I only knew one man who swore worse than Mike: that was Jonathan, and his choice was even more varied. But then he was Irish too.

Mike returned with one white satin rag of a ballet shoe and one bedroom slipper—red felt—both covered in fluff, and one stocking. "This is all I can find. She's taken everything with her. These will do. Put 'em on."

I sat on the rug in front of the fire, and put on the red slipper and Mimi's blocked ballet shoe, and tried to stand on the tip

of my toe in it, with my right foot—in the slipper—behind my left knee. When Mimi did that it looked easy. When I did it, down I went with a bump, and Mike laughed but I didn't, for what with one thing and another and Mimi's old shoes and no Mimi, and the ache of Nurse leaving, and that scene after prayers, I hadn't much laughter left in me.

Mike lowered himself into his chair and lit his old meerschaum pipe, which Mimi had named Smelly Nelly—turned coffee colour now and almost black round the edges—and he said between puffs, "So ye heard me playin' and ye came to hear more."

I nodded, not trusting my voice.

"Did ye like what ye heard?"

I nodded again.

The smoke from his pipe made a screen for his eyes, but I knew they were watching my face. I turned it away to busy myself with pulling up Mimi's old stocking that had a great hole in the knee.

So we stayed for a while in silence: I on the floor, with Mimi's oddly-paired shoes on my feet, my own shoes and stockings laid out to dry on the fender, and Mike in his chair swathed in smoke.

It had started to snow again—large white goose-feathers falling outside—and inside the warm glow of the room, with the crackle of the fire and the puffing of Mike's pipe the only sound. . . .

I can hear that silence still, and Mike's voice breaking through: "It's a queer thing what music will do to ye. If it's in you it's sure to come out—as sure as the song of a bird."

"But a bird," I said. "knows how to sing. A bird doesn't have to be taught."

"Nor does music," said Mike, "ye can't teach it."

I gaped at him: "Can't? But *you* do. You teach music."

"For me sins—and me livin', God help me! I couldn't teach you."

"Me? Why not me?" The thought turned me dizzy: "Oh, Mike, if you would—if only you'd teach me—" I gabbled. "Oh, Mike, I can play, I can truly, though nobody knows—not even Nurse knows—"

Mike said, "Does she not? Well, I do. I've heard ye"—he took his pipe from his mouth to point with its stem to the back of our house—"over there. Sometimes you forget to close the window."

I drew a long breath of surprise and gladness. Mike knew!

"But how? If Nurse and the maids—if nobody's heard, how could you? I play ever so soft without pedals."

"Music is heard by those who have the ears to hear, the eyes to see," said Mike.

"To see?" I wondered. "How can you *see* music in a person?"

He answered my question with another: "Have you ever seen the colour of a bud before it's through?"

I thought this out. "It's like a fist—so tightly folded. Yes—perhaps—sometimes the almond-blossom in your garden—but then I know it will be pink."

"How do ye know?"

"Because it always is."

"And if it always wasn't, ye'd see the colour shinin' in it just the same, no matter that it's folded—like a fist. And in the fist, you'll find the blossoms of its fingers."

"I suppose so," I murmured. "If you look."

"Exactly—*if* you look."

"It might," I squeezed my hands together, "it might perhaps have been Miss Sharp. How did you know it was me?"

"Do I know the difference between the screech of a macaw and the piping of a thrush?"

"The thrush knows its notes, and I don't."

"The fledgeling tries his notes when he's trying his wings. You're right. He doesn't have to worry. The music is in his throat. Give me your hands."

I got up and held them out to him, apologizing for the dirt. "They *were* clean—till I climbed over."

"It's not the dirt I mind," said Mike, pulling a long lip, as he felt my finger-joints, "it's the stiffness in um. Woman! They're ten bones ye have, and they ought to be jelly. Feel mine."

I felt his, they were boneless. "But hard," Mike said, "here." He pressed his finger-tips to the back of my hand. "Pads of strength to make the notes sing. And ye can't have a bone in your arm. From your wrist to your elbow must be indiarubber. I can't teach ye music—God's already done that—but I *can* teach these fingers to play. . . ."

* * *

Nurse used to say when one door shuts another opens. A door had closed upon my childhood, the day Nurse went from

me, but I found another door ajar that had been locked. It was you, Michael O'Connor, who led me to the threshold of your world where vision is transcribed in images that take upon themselves an independent life; a world wherein your ancient gods still dwell among the People of the Hills and ride their country as of old, and sing their songs.

I have never lost the magic that you taught me, those tales that have drifted down the ages from the first Celtic twilight. You understood 'outsideness.' Your folk, you said, call it being 'away,' and you told me the story of the girl to be married, who didn't care for the man and cried when the day would be coming, so that she wouldn't go along with him but ran out and hid in a thorn-bush. And presently while she is hiding comes to her a ragged man with grass-green hair and squirrel's eyes, who said he'd take her to his country where there is nothing but sweet music and youth cannot grow old and the body is like snow from head to foot, and there are flowers of the spring all the years of your life and a prince of the air for the asking.

All this the girl heard with a wonder and she went with the squirrel-eyed man where he led, and was never again seen until the time many years beyond count when the bridegroom who had married a shrew of a wife that had died on him, came home howling drunk from the wake and saw the girl standing by the door with a shawl on her head, and she was as young as the dawn of the day—while he was as old as the hills.

She told him she'd come from a powerful country that lies in the depths of the lake, where roads are unending and running with beer and there's dancing and feasting with a suckin' pig to table every day of the week. A place where men are charming and women are queens with crowns on their heads and shoes on their feet, and are lit to bed with Mother Mary's candles.

She'd all to tell him of the time she'd been 'away' for she knew everything. She stayed with him a day and a night, but in the morning early she was gone and he lay for dead where she had left him with his eyes open, blue as the lake, and his face was the face of a boy—and his hair that was silver turned gold. . . . "Now this I'll swear to what I'm sayin' for that man who was old and died young was me grandfather, Patrick O'Connor of Ballysadare in County Sligo. And may I rot if it's lies I'm tellin'."

Then he would make a song of it as compensation for the silence he imposed on my 'ten bones.' He made me practise

silent for six months. What was it he called that small two-octaved keyboard that he gave me? A name like caviare or some such thing. He told me he had found it in an old shop in Amsterdam. It was enclosed in a long wooden box. You could carry it under your arm and it worried me sick having to scheme and plan to hide it from Dowson, who had been Laura's maid and was mine when Nurse left. Martha had gone long ago to be married. Only Cook and Hood remained who had known me since I could remember.

Dowson was a pale slug of a woman, with a moist white face, colourless hair, and eyes like oysters. I kept my dumb piano in my playbox. It had a padlock to it but no key. I took the lock to Mike and he found a key to fit it, but it was risky with Dowson always prying round. I knew she had her oyster-eye on my locked playbox. She asked me what was in it. I told her only a lot of old rubbish.

"If it's old rubbish, it should be cleared away."

"And if I like to keep it, that's my business."

I had no fear of Dowson. I held her in my hand, with a threat that was nothing short of blackmail. Dowson had a young man in the Coldstreams—or it might be more correct to say several young men—for though in shape and height and colour they appeared to be identical, they never seemed to have the same face twice. On our walks in Kensington Gardens, Dowson, invariably accompanied by a scarlet-coated soldier, lagged behind while I strode on in front, lost to all things but the music in my ears. Mike was teaching me to read a score as if it were a book. I remember with what greed I devoured my first Chopin—the Mazurka in B Flat, and how I played it in my head or on my knees locked in the lavatory for so long at a time that Dowson came to pummel on the door.

Although Mike permitted me to play aloud on his piano if he were in the room to supervise, my fingers must stay soundless when alone. A queer method of instruction, and how I had to scheme and plot to keep my secret to myself. I knew, however, that the day must come—and not far distant—when my father would have to be told, so that I would be allowed to practise on the Steinway. I had begged that Mike should go and see Papa, but he said, "No need for that. When your fingers can speak, let them tell him."

Meanwhile, I dealt, regrettably, with Dowson.

"If you tell my Papa I climb over the wall and go to the house

at the back, I'll tell him a thing or two about yourself. What would my Papa say if he knew that you meet soldiers in the Park? I don't mind your soldiers—you can walk out with a whole regiment as far as I'm concerned—but one word to Papa of my doings and you know what to expect. You'll be disgraced." I treated Dowson to a smile that I hoped was no less frightful than Papa's; I saw her flinch. "You'll be dismissed without a reference. You'll never get another place. You may have to sweep crossings or sell matches in the streets—like the old noseless woman at the corner. Just fancy," I said, smiling, "if I told Papa about those soldiers. Poor Dowson. It would be the end of you."

And a poor white-livered thing she was, if ever there was one. I see her now with her oyster-eyes protruding, her drooping mouth agasp. "Miss Jenny! What a wicked thing to say. You must be crazed. I never——"

"No, Dowson," I said gently, "I'm not crazed, and don't make matters worse by telling lies. You know what comes to liars when they die. They go to hell—and burn." I paused a moment to reflect that such a doom might well be mine, for was I not myself a liar too—or as near as makes no matter? I hurried on. "And understand me, Dowson, I intend to climb over that wall and visit my friends in the house at the back *every day*—if I want to—without asking you. I have always climbed over the wall. Nurse knew I climbed over the wall and she let me. And, please, Dowson, do *try* not to look quite so much like a codfish. You can't help it, I know—but do try. . . . Wait. Don't interrupt. I've not finished. Listen, Dowson. Now that Miss Laura is married you will obey my orders in future. And if I order you to hold your tongue about me and my affairs, it'll be better for your own sake if you do."

Nurse had said I must learn to stand on my own feet, and though it damned me to perdition, I was learning.

Laura's wedding in March was a quiet affair; no reception, no bridesmaids. No invitations were issued, but an announcement appeared in the *Morning Post*, 'All friends will be welcome at the church.' Nurse stayed on to see Laura married and left at the end of the week.

I watched her pack, standing helplessly beside her in her bedroom where she knelt by her battered tin box, folding her clothes between layers of tissue-paper. I knew all her clothes. Her grey cloth dress and the cape in which she went walking with me, and the black bonnet tied with white muslin strings. I would

never see her wear those things again. Her starched uniforms, her aprons, were stowed away first: then came her second-best black with the twisted braid down the front which she wore on her day out: and the dark purple bombazine made for Belle's wedding, worn at Laura's—"And I'll wear it at yours," said Nurse, "see if I don't."

I smiled with tightly closed lips.

"I'm not goin' to the North Pole, you know." Nurse got up with some creaking of stays. "It's not as if you couldn't come and see me. It's only a matter of two hours by train. That's no distance."

I swallowed. I wanted to tell her of my music, of the little dumb piano that Mike had given me the day before, but I dared not speak for fear the held-in flood behind my throat would burst.

She looked so exactly as she always did, still wearing her starched holland dress, her spotless apron, her cuffs, her stiff collar, her cap with the grey wisps of hair straying from under its goffered white frill, her face a little redder from stooping. It wasn't possible she could be leaving me. When she had finished packing, she would change and put on her old brown cashmere and the dolman that lay ready on the bed for her departure, and her best bonnet trimmed with violets and bugles—the one she called her Sunday-go-to-meeting. She would wear that for the journey. She said that being black it wouldn't get dirty in the train and would only be crushed in the box.

Dowson came up to lend a hand, and Nurse told her, "It's all done, thank you, but you might ask Alice to whistle a cab. And, Dowson, don't forget her cod-liver oil. Every morning after breakfast. She can't keep it down without a squeeze of orange juice or lemon. And brimstone and treacle once a week."

Dowson stayed in Nurse's room until at breaking-point I screamed at her, "Dowson, go *away*! I want to be with Nurse without *you* here."

A fine beginning! Dowson gave me a narrow cold look and went, banging the door behind her.

Nurse said, "People are to us as we are to them, remember. You must be nice to her and pleasant, then she'll be nice to you. Now just go outside while I change my dress."

I stood outside till she called me in. She was ready to go, bonnet and all, stuffing the last odds and ends into her stout leather bag. How well I knew that bag—like a small portmanteau.

Very shabby. She always took it with her when we went on holidays. It contained sandwiches and first aid for the journey, a tiny flask of brandy for me in case I was sick; a clean towel for the same purpose, and lint and bandages for likely accidents. Nurse always entered a train prepared for the worst and left it thanking God for safe deliverance.

"I've got ten minutes yet," said Nurse, "and what I want to tell you I've been leavin' for the last. Your Pa and me—we talked it over—and we thought you'd take it better from meself than from anyone else. And there's another thing. I don't want you to misjudge your Pa. I've always told you that his bark's worse than his bite. He means well by you and he loves you. You mustn't think he don't because he does."

I muttered something to effect that if he did he had a funny way of showing it.

"That's as may be. Some of us show least when we feel most. I'll give him his due—he's done 'andsome by me now I'm leaving. He's giving me a pension of five and twenty pounds a year and with what I've got put by I'll be in clover—see?"

I saw, and smiled, tightly.

"But that," said Nurse, "isn't what I had to tell you, though I thought you'd like to know." She sat down on a flounced arm-chair by the fire-place. I sat on her strapped tin box.

"You remember my sayin' there'd be some changes in this house?"

I nodded.

"Well, we've had two already. Laura's marriage, my leavin'—and what happens twice, happens three times, they say. There's another change to come—in the near future."

Nurse fumbled in her pocket, produced a handkerchief and wiped her face.

"Papa," I managed to articulate, "said something to me about . . . reasons for your leaving."

"Yes." Nurse blew her nose with a startling blast. "But he didn't tell you, did he? He didn't drop a hint?"

I shook my head.

"Well, it's this." Nurse spoke in jerks. Her voice sounded more than ever rusty. "He's still a youngish man, you know. He's had a peck of trouble in his life, losing both his wives. There's only you left now that Laura's gone. And you're not old enough to be much company for 'im. It's natural for a man of his age to marry. And so he's going to *be* married.

To a very nice lady," said Nurse in a hurry. "You'll like her."

The shock of this announcement, stupefying though it was, did not immediately penetrate the fog of my misery. I gazed at Nurse, dry-mouthed, dry-eyed, my fingers picking at my skirt. "Married," I whispered, "Papa . . ."

A stepmother! Horror seized me with visions of the Brothers Grimm—not yet outgrown—in whose tales of frightfulness the intentions of all stepmothers are murderous.

"It won't be so bad as you think," Nurse said with false cheer. "She's got no children of her own, that's one blessing. And you'll be glad to have a Ma in three or four years' time, when you start goin' to balls and put your hair up."

I croaked a question: "Shall I have to call her Mother or Mamma?"

"It won't kill you if you do. It costs nothing to be polite."

"Have you ——" I licked my lips, "have you seen her?"

"Once. The other day. She asked your Pa if she could have a chat with me. And if you want to know it was her idea that I should break it to you. I took a fancy to her meself. He might do a lot worse—though she's not quite my cup o' tea. A bit too show-off and fond of her dress—but who isn't? She's a sensible age and a widow, and she'll do your Pa a power of good to my thinkin'. And if you mind your P's and Q's and don't let her see you in your tantrums, you'll get along fine with her too. . . . Come here."

She set down her bag that all this time she had been nursing in her lap, and held out her hand. I rose and went to her, and knelt by her chair, pulling her face down to mine. She stroked my hair.

"No matter how old you are," Nurse whispered, "you'll always be my baby. We're not going to say good-bye. There's no good-byes between you and me. Say not good-bye but olive oil——" That was an old joke of hers. I smiled, tight-lipped, and felt something warm and wet drop on my cheek, not from my eyes; they were numb. "And I'll write you regular and you must write to me. You know where I'm goin'. I'll be in touch with Belle. I'll see her whenever she comes to stay with her Ma — and Pa-in-law. And if ever you want me—wherever you are—you've only to say. I'll be waiting. . . ."

So she went from me. I saw her go. I walked with her down the stairs and stayed at the front door while she said her good-byes in the kitchen. The servants followed her out to the area

steps in a group—Cook, Hood and the housemaids. Alice, I noticed, was crying. How strange, when I had no tears.

She walked up the steps clutching the handle of her bag and umbrella and got into the cab. The cabman hoisted the luggage and strapped it, climbed on to his seat and whipped up his horse. The cab turned and rumbled along down the Terrace and into the Square. Then a blindness came and hid it from my sight. . . .

I shut the door.

III

"It won't be as bad as you think," Nurse had said. But I was prepared for the worst. Although I had no reason to cherish Papa, he did at least represent the devil I knew, but what of the devil I didn't? I was not left long in doubt.

My meeting with Mrs Caswell, my father's bride-to-be, took place on a Sunday at Grandpapa's house: this, a tactical manœuvre on the part of Papa, who in one gesture revealed the two family skeletons, myself and Aunt Rosie, together. Mrs Caswell could take us or leave us.

That she did not adopt the latter course indicates an admirable fortitude. She accepted us undaunted. We were, I think, no easy proposition.

I, black with resentment and ready to hate, sat on the edge of a slippery chair upholstered in salmon-pink satin. The drawing-room, seldom used, had been thrown open to welcome my father's fiancée. The air reeked of Grandpapa's eucalyptus, Aunt Rosie's scent and an abundance of flowering plants arranged in a coffin-like box under a massive wall-mirror. Grandpapa had been lavish; Aunt Rose, too, decked out in her jewels and her latest creation of remnants, composed of sky-blue velvet and violet brocade. Grandpapa, suffering from a cold in the head, was bad-tempered and deafer than usual. He sat upright in a cushionless chair before a blazing fire with a plaid shawl round his shoulders, alternately dozing and waking to sneeze and say, "God damme, what's to do?"

Papa lectured both of us, Aunt Rosie and myself, before the arrival of his lady. To me he said: "Understand that this is a far greater ordeal for Mrs Caswell than it is for you. I trust, my dear, that you will endeavour to be gracious. 'Assume a virtue if you have it not.' This is a tremendous event in your life for which I hope you will be grateful. It will be the saving of you."

From what? I wondered mutely. From what abyss was I about to be withdrawn? Having visualized my future stepmother as a bi-sexual combination of the Murdstones, plus a touch of the Witch in Snow White, I could see no cause for gratitude, no possible reason why I should regard this tremendous event in my life as anything other than awful. I returned my father's smile with a glare.

"Rosie!"

Aunt Rosie, who had been perambulating restlessly, sniffing at the flowers and talking to herself, halted in the middle of the room. "What is it? I must go upstairs. I've taken salts."

"Rosie," Papa questioned with restraint, "is it necessary to appear in all your glory? Might I suggest that this"—he lifted his eye-glass to gaze upon the sparkle on her sky-blue velvet front—"this display of diamonds on a Sunday afternoon is somewhat out of place? One would suppose that you had been put up for auction. Go to Bartlett and have those brooches and those bangles and those rings removed at once. You look——" I could almost see his molars grinding in his jaws behind his beard—"you look ridiculous."

"I won't"—said Aunt Rosie stubbornly—"I won't take them off—not if the Queen was coming. I wouldn't. I never get a chance to wear them, and wear them I shall. I can't wear them when I'm dead. It'll be *her*," she pointed at me, "who'll wear them then. I'm tellin' you now—Jenny's to have 'em. Your wife's not going to have 'em, that I swear. I'll be buried with 'em sooner." She went to Grandpapa's side and leaned over to shout at him, "Pa! Nicholas says I'm to take off my jewellery. I know why. He wants to give it all to his intended. I've told him she can't have it. It was Ma's and I'm leavin' it to Jenny. I want to make my will."

Grandpapa jerked up his chin. "Make your what?"

"Jewellery," screamed Aunt Rosie, "he won't let me wear my jewellery. He wants to give it all to his young lady. I don't want to see her. I won't be polite. She's after his money—that's all she's after. Money grubbin', I call it. Who'd want to marry him except for his money? She don't know what she's let herself in for, but I do and I'll tell her. *I'll tell her!*"

I bit back a giggle, and glanced at Papa. He was purple.

"Rosie! Leave the room at once. You are not in a fit state . . . I see I was mistaken in thinking—hoping—that you could behave like a normal person. You are *not* a normal person. You are

abnormal. Why"—Papa raised his eyes to heaven and appealed—"why am I cursed with an abnormality for a sister? What curse has been cast upon me and my daughter—this poor innocent here—that *she* should be tainted with——"

"Pa!" screamed Aunt Rosie, shaking Grandpapa's arm, "he's cursin'. He's callin' down curses. I don't want to see his young lady." Her face crumpled up. "He's cursed me. I shall have diarrhoea."

Grandpapa patted her hand.

"There, there. What in the devil——" he turned to Papa, "have you been sayin' to upset her? You never come into this house but you don't upset the poor thing. Why can't you leave her alone?"

It was not the first time I, with inward rejoicing, had witnessed a scene of this sort; Grandpapa, strong in defence of his daughter, asserting himself with his son.

Papa turned from purple to puce.

"Very well. I'll go out of the house and will never return. I will wait on the doorstep outside the front door and intercept Mrs Caswell's arrival. I might have known what would happen if I brought her here—to this—this lunatic asylum. I'd hoped to be honest and fair. I'd hoped to offer her my family for what it is—and only God and my patience *knows* what it is. No woman in her senses would accept me if *she* knew what it is. I must have been as mad as this creature"—he flung a hand in the direction of Aunt Rosie—"to have imagined for one moment that any woman in her senses——"

"Mrs Caswell," announced Bateman at the door.

She made a good entrance, standing there in the doorway, wrapped in sables to the chin, her ample curves displayed to full advantage in the close-fitting dress of the period that followed the lines of the figure in front, and monstrously distorted it behind. My first impression of her never altered: I see her always as I saw her then, a big blonde woman with a wide-mouthed smile, and teeth as white as almonds, or my father's. Her presence, on the threshold of that room, drew our eyes as to a magnet, possessed, enfolded us in her embrace. You might have counted ten before Papa hastened forward.

Grandpapa's shawl slid from his shoulders; I slid from my chair and stood up. Aunt Rosie said, loud: "How do you do? Are your ears burnin'? We were just——"

"Jenny!" Papa beckoned me to his side with a frantic gesture

of his hand behind his back. And in that mute appeal I perceived the first suspicion of a weakness in him who had hitherto personified to me unbounded strength. I had a momentary prick—not of conscience but of pity; or it might have been affection, if it were possible to feel affection for Papa.

"This is Jenny, Selina—my youngest." Papa laid his hand on my head.

Between those two who towered I felt small. I seemed to dwindle. Both were large and both were smiling. Their smiles melted on the air. I could not help but think of Cheshire Cats. Yes, a pair of golden cats and a handsome couple, too. Sleek, purring and well-fed, well-satisfied.

"Jenny!" The lady swooped upon me. I was squashed in sable furs. "Why, Nicholas! The darling! I'd no idea—what eyes!"

And what a voice! Full and mellow as a bottle of old wine. Looking up into her face I could see while she spoke the red vault of her palate. Nature had endowed her with a sound-box as magnificent as Trilby's—only that, like Trilby, Selina was tone deaf.

She kissed me, warm and wide. She held me fast. I wriggled free, and slinking round an eye, caught Grandpapa's; I could almost swear his eyelid drooped.

"Come and meet my father." Papa propelled his lady forward. "And my"—he cleared his throat—"my sister Rose."

There could be no avoidance; Aunt Rosie was firmly planted in the way.

"My! Aren't you tall," remarked Aunt Rosie, "his first and second were both little women, but you——"

"Here, sir," Papa drowned the remainder of that in a rising crescendo. "Here is Selina. It is a great joy to me"—his voice died from a boom to a mumble—"to have the—ah—pleasure of introducing my—ah—future . . . Jenny! Pick up your grandfather's shawl."

I stooped to retrieve and replace it.

"Selina, my love, allow me to present you. I fear you will have to speak up." (No need to tell her that.) "My father is a little hard of hearing."

"Mr Drew!" Grandpapa's claw-like hand was seized and held between white gloves. "This is indeed a great moment."

Grandpapa rose shakily and bowed at arm's length. "Pray, ma'am, excuse my cold. You don't find me at my best."

"Cold or not!" Selina cried ecstatically. "I'm going to kiss you!"

And she did. Again I caught Grandpapa's eye, and this time there was no mistaking it; he winked. A giggle that started in my stomach surged to an explosion in my throat. Papa was looking at me. I contrived to turn my splutters to a cough.

The entrance of tea created a diversion. Papa took me aside and bade me "Go and tell Bartlett to come for your aunt." But Aunt Rosie insisted on staying. So Bartlett stayed, too, on guard at the end of the room. Aunt Rosie behaved very well on the whole, though she gobbled three slices of cake and was highly delighted when Selina admired her dress. She said, "Nick don't like me to wear all my jewels. I was just tellin' him now if I die——"

"Rosie!" Papa uttered, and gazed imploringly at Mrs Caswell, whose tact was quite superb.

"My dear! We mustn't talk of dying on such a happy day. What an exquisite perfume. I don't think that I know it. Is it a new one of Rimmel's?"

We all came in for our share of attention. My eyes were praised again—"Like great brown velvet pansies. Aren't they, Nicholas? And what lashes! One could hang rings on them, I do declare!"

"See my rings?" said Aunt Rosie. "I'm leaving them to——"

"Jenny, pass the cake to Mrs Caswell," said Papa.

The cake was praised. "Delicious! Is it home-made? What an excellent cook you must have."

"Bought," said Aunt Rosie, "at a shop round the corner."

The room: "Such a charming colour scheme." Salmon-pink and yellow, truly frightful, every available wall space filled with atrocious oil paintings in gilt frames: but there were one or two good pieces of furniture—some Chippendale chairs and a Sheraton bureau.

"What a duck of a thing!" cried Selina. "I see you go in for antiques, Mr Drew."

Grandpapa inclined an ear. "Go in for what?"

Selina repeated.

"No!" Grandpapa twinkled, "I'm at the age when nothing past twenty's my limit."

And even that didn't daunt her, though I saw Papa writhe. She flung back her head and laughed till she showed her red palate, while Grandpapa grinned his approval. She was more to his taste than the first or the second—this third Mrs Nicholas Drew.

They were married on Midsummer's Day. Immediately after the wedding, to which only the family and Selina's nearest relatives

were invited, my father and his wife departed for an eight weeks' honeymoon abroad.

I was removed to Grandpapa's house pending the redecoration of our own. Selina had been caught by the transcendental craze, which strange revolt from ugliness sublime to preciosity ridiculous, had spread from Belgrave Square to Bayswater, from Mayfair to Muswell Hill. Regardless of Gilbertian satire and the acrid humour of *Punch*, the cult for Beauty, led by that remarkable young genius, Oscar Wilde, flourished like an arum lily on a dustheap. Victoria and Albert mahogany was dragged out to make room for the walnut of William and Mary. Shrieking reds and prussian blues dissolved in purple patches. All colours faded; green became 'yallery,' gowns became 'garments' and clung. Chelsea Embankment was littered with artists painting views in a Whistler fog. Every suburb had its Bunthorne, every house its Damozel. A decade of æsthetics had arrived.

At our house, Selina, by appointment, interviewed soulful-eyed young gentlemen in coats of velveteen, to discuss the relative advantages of peacock-patterned walls and Morris chintzes. They stood in clusters on the landings, they sped from room to room, bearing cuttings of materials that ranged from canary-colour to deep apricot, from sage to sadder green. Headed by Selina, they descended to the basement. There I met them, glowering. This, my province, should never, I determined, be disturbed. "I like my sitting-room" (no longer called the nursery) "as it is. I don't want to have it altered."

"But, dear, so dark and gloomy. That hideous wall-paper. Why not," urged Selina, "take the large parlour upstairs for your own? Such a bright, sunny room. We could make it quite charming with pretty new hangings— that sunflower yellow is just the right tone." She seized a sample from the soulful-eyed young man. "Don't you agree, Mr— um— um?"

Mr Um-um agreed intensely. He said that it captured the essence of sunshine and was happy without being crude.

I maintained an inimical silence.

Selina persevered.

"Dear, do be reasonable, won't you? Why bury yourself in the basement?"

"I have always," I said, regarding my toes, "buried myself in the basement."

"But that," Selina argued with laudable patience, "was when your sisters were at home. There is no reason why you should

stay down here now." She glanced at my dingy brown walls, my worn carpet, my table with the red chenille cloth where Nurse used to put me to sleep. "It can't be nice to be so near the kitchen."

"I like to be near the kitchen," I said. "I like Cook."

"I hope, my dear," Selina suggested, "that you do not gossip with the servants."

"I talk to Cook sometimes, and Hood. I've known them ever since I was born."

"Of course," she conceded, "old retainers *are* different. And if you prefer to stay down in this cellar——"

"I do."

She offered her most winning smile in return for my scowl. "Then you shall. I do not want you to feel that I am interfering with your life," she paused, "in any way at all."

I was silent.

"I want you, dear child, to look upon me——" I looked upon her, and saw her eyes, yellowish green as her samples, regarding me a little hurt, a little anxious. I shifted my gaze to the floor. I was not to be won—"to look upon me," pursued Selina, "as a friend—if not as a mother. I know I can never take the place of that dear one who has gone——"

"Do you mean Nurse?" I interrupted as she paused.

"No," Selina said gently, "I meant your own dear mother."

"I never knew her," I said, "so you can't."

Thus my response to that good soul's advances. For my behaviour I can offer no excuse. There must have been a blind spot in me somewhere that I so wilfully ignored the substance in the shadow of an image I created for myself. I despised her for her tricks of speech, her affectations; for the golden falseness of her hair, for her rouge, her cosmetics. Strange, that paint and powder used by every one of us to-day should have been considered rather shocking in the 'eighties. I could not see beyond these trivial accessories to the warmth of the reality behind them. And even when I realized how greatly I had misjudged her, an ugly streak in me refused to make amends. I gave no quarter; none was asked.

It is not pleasant to remember how I nurtured my resentment till it passed from me to her to blight the bloom of her goodwill, like frost upon an orchard; not pleasant to recall that in this I see myself, my father's daughter. Yes, though the world and he might doubt it, I do not. Too surely I inherited that same sadistic

taint sprung from God knows what unhappy source—turned always to one whom he judged to be weak, for all it rendered him ridiculous, grotesque, in self-inflation. His seed persisted, with more subtlety, in me. . . .

Dowson! How loathing, I tormented her: though she was a poor thing and I can feel no shame of it. Perhaps I ought. But Selina, that great warm golden cat, who wanted only that I would take and stroke her and she'd purr, what evil strain impelled me to reject her, and rejecting gloat on her discomfort? With uncanny insight I perceived she feared me as much or more than I feared her: feared lest she should blunder, lest she fail in her mission as third mistress of that house. For all her size and presence she was nervous; that I knew. Yes, I was sharp. Grown bolder in perception I took my stance and held it; held, too, the key position. She came as interloper to *my* house. I was there first. It was my right, I argued, to resent her, and with what malicious artlessness did I contrive to let her know.

It sickens me when I look back upon myself as then I was, as still I am. For what is bad in us or good in us must surely ripen with old age . . . must ripen till the fruit falls from the tree.

* * *

The invasion of our house by workmen had begun. The exterior was to be repainted first. Ladders were hoisted and faces appeared at all times at my bedroom window. Everywhere a smell of turpentine pervaded. Stair-carpets were removed, footsteps sounded hollow on bare boards. I was glad to escape with Dowson to Grandpapa's house.

That visit was to have far-reaching results, for it was during this time that I confided to Grandpapa my secret. I had brought my dumb piano with me but my lessons had to be suspended, since I was never allowed out without that wretched Dowson at my heels. There was now no possibility of sneaking over the wall to the house at the back, and I was sick of my lies and excuses. I felt I ought to draw the line at last—and so I did.

Grandpapa, I had long ago decided, should be the first to hear me play. I had now been practising three months on my little dumb piano and my fingers though not yet approaching flexibility, were beginning to unbend. Also my ear had developed. Mike gave me tests. With my back turned I could tell him the

notes he was playing, and I was rapidly learning to read. That was the greatest of surprises—I could read music away from the piano. I did not necessarily have to play the notes to hear the sound of them, I could hear them in my head.

I found Grandpapa a disappointing confidant. It was difficult to make him understand. "You play the piano? Is that Sharp woman teaching you?"

"Oh, Grandpapa!" I perched myself on the arm of his chair, and put my lips to his ear. "Haven't you heard what I've been telling you? This is the most tremendous thing that has ever happened to me. Don't you understand? I can *play* the *piano*. Not as I shall play one day—but better than I ever hoped I should, or that anyone would have believed. I don't believe it myself yet. Listen——"

I made him listen. I told him everything. How I had lied and schemed that I might practise, and how I threatened Dowson——

"You did what?" ejaculated Grandpapa.

"That horrid Dowson. I frightened her into holding her tongue about my climbing over the wall. It is such a long story, Grandpapa. It goes back to when I was little. It has been going on for years. Papa forbade me to know the O'Connors—but I went on knowing them just the same. Nurse let me—and thank goodness she did, for if she hadn't——"

"Now, now, now!" Grandpapa caught my chin in his hand and held it hard between his bony fingers. "What have you been doin' on the sly? Climbin' walls and goin' to see music masters, hey? What sort of a feller is it who'll encourage you to deceive your father?"

"But he didn't! He found out. He heard me playing when our drawing-room windows were open. Nobody else ever heard me but him. He has the ears to hear. He's different. He's not an ordinary person. Oh! If only you weren't so deaf."

I scrambled off the chair-arm, tugging at his hand. "Come upstairs now. I'll play to you. Come to the drawing-room. You have a lovely piano that nobody uses——"

Yes, in those days every household possessed a piano varying in size and make, according to the income and social status of the owner, much as in this mechanized age we all possess, in some degree, a car. While the pre-war capitalists invested in five-hundred-guinea radios and two-thousand-guinea Rolls, Victorian stability was assessed by the elegance of a carriage and pair and grand piano. Every drawing-room boasted a

magnificent instrument upon which the daughters of the house tinkled out their 'pieces' or played their own accompaniments to the sugary ballads with which they entertained their Mamma's guests. Thank heaven the wireless has killed these parlour tricks, but where are the pianos? Fallen, maybe, under the auctioneer's hammer, to moulder in fusty lounges of second-rate hotels, and so end the way of all things that have played their part in life, and have grown weary.

My excitement did at last persuade Grandpapa that something was afoot. I dragged him from his chair and up the stairs, talking all the time. "Once you've heard me you can judge. If you think that I play well enough to go on being taught—then you must tell Papa. I daren't. You don't know, Grandpapa——" I stopped on the landing and faced him with a fire in my cheeks—"you don't *know* the torture it is to keep something bottled up inside that is longing to burst out. It is as if always there was something beating here"—I touched my head; then, a sudden recollection made me sweep my fringe of hair aside. "You see my scar?"

"Hey?" Grandpapa stooped and peered, and drew his lips down. "H'm. A pity. A great pity. You have a fine forehead, too, but don't let it worry you, my darlin'. It don't show."

"It doesn't matter whether it shows or not!" I cried impatiently. "I was going to say—Papa told me, I remember, long ago, when this scar first happened, that the toad carries a jewel in its head. Well, I'm the toad, see, Grandpapa? But I don't carry the jewel in my head—I carry it here in my fingers." I spread them out. "And you mustn't think," I said, "that I'm conceited. You can't be conceited about something that has been given you by God. That's what Mike says, anyway."

"Very," said Grandpapa, looking utterly bewildered. "Very."

"Oh, dear!" I laughed and seized his hand and led him to the drawing-room and plumped him in a chair by the piano. "Sit there, and then you'll be able to hear me—I hope."

The piano, a Bechstein, was draped in the usual kind of shawl and furnished with Dresden candelabra, silver oddments and a photograph of me taken when I was a baby wearing nothing but a vest. Having stripped the lid of its covering, I raised it. Grandpapa got up and said, "Hey, what are you about? That pianner's not meant to be opened."

"It must be opened," I retorted, "and undressed." For Mike had told me that to cover a piano was a sin to rot you in everlasting hell. "'Tis bad enough," he used to say, "that man's

nakedness is clothed and we have to thank you, Woman, for that. But the shame of it is nothing to the monstrous crime it is to put a shirt on a piano."

I watched Grandpapa's face while I played the Chopin Mazurka in B Flat and I know that I surprised him. I am sure he thought he was being tricked, for he sat there peering round about as though expecting to find one of those new-fangled phonographs hidden somewhere in the room, and when at last convinced that none but I was playing, he stood beside me watching and breathing down his nose.

"I don't play many pieces," I told him. "I do mostly exercises, and I'm not really allowed to play at all, but Mike wouldn't mind me playing to you when so much depends upon it. Now, Grandpapa, would you like me to play the 'Blue Danube'? I've not learned it, but I'll play it by ear."

So I played it by ear, as long ago I had heard Mitzi play it, and that, I think, staggered him more than the Chopin Mazurka.

"God bless me!" he ejaculated. "You're a born musician. A musician," he repeated in a daze, and almost shocked. "A musician in the family! Now where could you have got it from? Not my side, I'll wager. I can't tell a sharp from a flat outside of a law court." He chuckled. I went on playing while he talked, and presently through my strumming I heard a barrel-organ in the street, grinding out the latest popular air from 'The Mikado.' It was on everybody's lips just then, that song of the flowers that bloom in the spring. I caught up the key and followed the organ, and I think my trumpety rendering of that pleased Grandpapa most of all for he was a great Savoy enthusiast and went regularly to all first nights of the D'Oyley Carte productions. He began to sing, amazingly, in tune:

"The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra la
Have nothing to do with the case,
I've got to take under my wing, tra la
A most unattractive old thing, tra la——"

"Why, Grandpapa," I shouted, "you have a perfect ear!" And if he didn't start capering around and beating time while he sang, looking for all the world like a leggy old stork—till puffing and blowing he flopped into his chair. "Whew! Egad, girl! You've bewitched me. Gilbert and Sullivan, hey? Where did ye learn to play Gilbert and Sullivan? Have you seen 'The Mikado'?"

I shook my head and went on playing.

"Then you *shall* see 'The Mikado.' Upon my soul, I can't get over it," declared Grandpapa, taking his handkerchief and mopping his face. "We will have to look into this. We'll have you taught by the best teacher in London."

"Grandpapa!" I crashed a grand finale and stood up. "I'm *being* taught by the best teacher in London. I've been trying to tell you so."

"Stuff!" said Grandpapa. "No one's ever heard of *him*! How much does he charge?"

"I don't know what he charges and I don't *care* what he charges. He's been teaching me for nothing all this time, but he can't go *on* teaching me for nothing. You wouldn't like him to, would you, Grandpapa?"

"Here," said Grandpapa suspiciously, "has he been puttin' you up to this?"

"Gracious, no!" I cried. "What a horrid idea! Of course not."

"I'm not so sure," he muttered.

I slid on to his knee.

"Why not——" the words tumbled out of me quicker than the thought. "Why not go and see him for yourself? Yes, Grandpapa, order the carriage, now this minute, and go and see him. And he'll tell you what he thinks of me and whether or no I am *worth* being taught. And if he says I am and if Papa won't pay for my lessons—then—will you?"

"Pay? Hey?" Grandpapa poked a skinny finger at my cheek. "Pay! It's always pay with you girls." He pushed me aside and rose to his feet, gave a tug at his waist-coat. "Look here! I've been dancin'. You've started me dancin'," he twinkled. "So I'm to order the carriage and call on this feller—this what's-his-name—Mike?"

"Michael O'Connor."

"And where does he live—this O'Connor?"

I told him.

"Then," said Grandpapa, "'Stand not upon the order of your going'—and *if* I'm goin'," he took out his watch. "why, damme! I'd better go now!"

I never knew by what Machiavellian cunning 'Old Nick' persuaded his son to take all credit of my music to himself, but so it was. Papa, once persuaded that my talent was exceptional, insisted that he had always known it. "Always," he

emphatically stated. "Again and again have I told that Sharp woman that the child had a gift which should be fostered. When the fool came with a face as long as her arm to inform me 'Jenny is playing by ear,' I said, 'Why should she *not* play by ear? To play by ear is a gift,' I said. 'A musical gift.' I told her so. But I was as usual defied. In my own house I was defied by a pinched-faced ignoramus. *She* must know better than I. *She* must decide that my child—a musical prodigy—was not worth teaching. It is pathetic, positively pathetic——" roared Papa, "that this unhappy child should have been terrorized into believing it a sin to play by ear, which any half-wit surely would have known is a gift in itself—to say nothing of years wasted."

I had been prepared for a tornado of wrath, of rows, of arguments, or at best, a grudging concession that I might continue my lessons under the auspices of Miss Sharp, but never this enthusiasm, this astonishing change of front, for which I guessed Grandpapa had been in part responsible. All the same I trembled for my fate. What accounting could I give for my defiance of command? How explain away the fact that all these years I had continued an acquaintance with 'those Irish'? Mike! How in heaven's name could I account for Mike?

"This fellow—this O'Connor is some protégé of your grandfather, I understand?" I perked my ears and drew a breath. My! What a story, but I gloated. Dear Grandpapa—you cunning wise old bird. "This what's-his-name, whom your grandfather so strongly recommends—let me see now—was there not some trouble with these people in the past? I seem to recollect——?"

I panted, "Yes, Papa. I used to play with Mimi in the garden."
"With whom?"

"They have a daughter, Mimi. We used to talk over the wall."

"Yes, yes—the wall." Papa snatched at some illusive memory and let it go. "Selina, my dear, my father speaks most highly of this fellow, and certainly his terms are not outrageous. Half a guinea. Of course, later when she is more advanced I will secure one of the finest teachers from the Royal Academy of Music, but in the meantime——"

In the meantime it was enough for me. Grandpapa had truly worked a miracle. Events moved swiftly now. Papa decreed, "Miss Sharp must go." And Miss Sharp went.

In her place came thrice weekly a Mademoiselle Bouton, and on alternate days a Fräulein—of all names—Messerschmitt. These ladies gave me polish and an ultimate fair knowledge of

their tongues. Both were considerably more advanced in their methods of instruction than Miss Sharp. Mademoiselle Bouton was a lively little creature who called me "Ma Poupée," and bought me delicious Chocolat Meunier as a token of good marks. Fräulein Messerschmitt, an unwieldy flaxen-haired young woman, slow and painfully sentimental, read Heine while I improvised accompaniments. She led me laboriously through the lives of Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin, in German, and wrote rapturous monthly reports of my progress to Papa.

I had been studying six months, with Papa's permission, under Mike, when Selina decided to study singing under Mitzi. Selina possessed a voice, or it might be more correct to say a vocal instrument, of exceptional power. Yes, that great arched palate, that generous diaphragm, sheltered a superb contralto, superb in range and volume, yet—most sorry trick of nature—that voice could not sing true. That voice was flat, but how that voice was flat! To set your teeth a-grind, your nerves a-tingle. The pity of it! Although Selina, unaware of her deficiency, had no pity for herself. As a girl she had been the despair of her teachers. "Only Svengali could make that voice music," said Mitzi with tears, "it is fri-i-ghtful. Ah—ah—ah—ah—ah—ah——" She produced an ear-splitting scale a semitone out, and we laughed, Mike and I, while she fumed. "It is *drôle*, this crippled god? That is what it is, this voice, a crippled god——"

"—Ess," I murmured, "feminine."

"No, then! Orpheus," flashed Mimi, "isn't he a god? A crippled Orpheus. Can you not understand, you pig-dog, how I feel?" She turned on Mike, where he sat at his Bechstein, and pummelled his arm with her fist. "Will you please not to play when I speak? This woman she will have me teach her, and I have not the heart to say, 'No, my dear, your voice it is a beauty, but a sleeping beauty, which I have not the magic to wake.' That is what she needs—is magic. Am I a witch then to work magic?"

"Glory be to God," Mike said, "ye are. You'd make an elephant sing." But never Selina, whose ear, in spite of all Mitzi's passionate zeal, remained mute. Still, Selina persisted. She worked at her voice exercises with a patient industry that put me to shame. I lacked her singleness of purpose, her concentration. I was lazy. I jibbed at work. My dumb piano having ceased to be a novelty was now a penance. If I could wriggle out of practising, I did. I was glad enough to be roped in to play Selina's accompaniments as an excuse for not 'having time' to give two hours a day to my fingers.

Then Mike rose up in wrath at me. "I'm damned if I'm going to sweat blood on the lazy devil that ye are. Have I not heard ye at your strummin'—like sufferin' cats?"

He sat at his piano and played with horrible emphasis some trumpery waltz or other that I had that morning written down, and thought myself a wonder. "Sugar and spice and all that's nice," chanted Mike, "filthy-minded treacle-trash. I'll rub yer nose in it. Ye'll play nothin' for a week, ye understand, but yer own treacle-trash. I'm disgusted with ye." He went on raging through the tinkle-tinkle of my waltz, while I stood by, very shattered. "I thought ye had a clean ear, a sound taste, but I see I was mistaken. Dirt! D'ye hear it? Very well then—go and wallow in it, but don't bring your muck to me."

I had brought him with such pride my composition. Dirt, he called it. Dirt it was. Thank God for Mike's good guidance. He knew my flaws, he knew I had not much discrimination. I needed just that curb to hold me back. Mike was artist through and through, his sense unerring. Mine was not. Had I studied seriously I might have been a good enough executive, but intellectually I was always second-rate. Mike saved me in those early days from complete annihilation. I might so easily have sunk. It was all too easy. That's the pity. My fluency was my undoing.

"Ye need a purge," Mike told me, "go—read Bach, read Mozart, read the Masters till ye're clean. Ye're choked with treacle."

He tore my poor little effort apart and flung the pieces in the fire.

I slunk from him then, tail down, to be met by Selina and soothed. As sure as Mike cleansed, so did she replenish me with flattery. I swallowed it whole, as I swallowed the adulation of her cronies. I was in demand at her 'At Homes' and dinners. I should have been grateful. She gave me a free rein in that house where hitherto I had been ignored. Perseveringly she wooed me. I stayed behind my barrier, aloof. She strove to keep the peace between my father and myself, and she succeeded. She managed him: she could not manage me.

When I, disloyally, complained to her of Mike's denunciation, I found an ardent sympathizer in Selina. "He should encourage you in composition. That you can compose at all at your age, I think, is wonderful."

I thought it rather wonderful myself.

"But don't let his criticism," Selina urged, "deter you. If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again."

Her platitudes! I gnawed my lip and smiled.

"I shall not try again."

"Oh, come! You mustn't be put down. I hope that Mr O'Connor *is* the right teacher for you."

I was almost beginning to doubt it.

And while Selina plastered me with flummery, and while I laid her unction to my soul, I gave nothing in return; although I knew she longed to have me show some interest in her voice. I would not truckle. I was blunt to cruelty.

"Can't you hear that you are out? You have a voice, but you can't sing. I don't understand why you should *want* to sing without an ear. Why don't you give it up?"

She would never give it up. It was pitiful the way she worked and practised while I lazed. She gave musical 'At Homes' to which Mike and Mitzi were invited, though Mike never came. But Mitzi did, to flirt disgracefully with all the men. Even Papa admitted that he found her 'quite a charming little woman, and much too good for that Irish boor,' whom he declared he would never receive in his house.

Selina sang to her guests, who professed themselves enchanted.

Those 'At Homes' were really dreadful. Selina would ask me afterwards, "Did I disgrace myself? I thought I was in better form to-day."

"Why," I inquired, "do you ask me? You know my opinion of your voice. You had far better give it up. You will never sing in tune. I saw some people laughing."

I saw, too, her cheeks flame, her full lips tremble. "They *laughed*? No, Jenny, don't tease. Is that true?"

"I am not teasing. It is true. Why should I tell you if it wasn't?"

And again when she bought a new gown I must pass judgment. She would put it on, and parade before me where I stood, coolly critical.

"It makes you look too fat. You are," I told her gently, "getting fat."

"No, dear, I am thinner. Do you not think that I am thinner lately, Blanche?"

Blanche was the maid she had brought with her, a mincing Cockney, who was perpetually at war with Dowson.

"Yes, madam, ever so much thinner. I can pull you in a good inch more than what I used."

"You look fatter in that dress," I insisted. "I don't really think it suits you. It may be stylish, but you are too big just here." I described in vacancy a protuberance above my own flat bosom. "But I don't know anything about the fashions, so why ask me?"

Why did she ask me? It was like worrying an aching tooth, the way she always sought me out, only to be turned upon herself, rebuffed.

I have never clearly understood myself in that relationship. Charles, who years afterwards revealed so much to me, described it as a simple case of vengeance. Selina, as my father's wife, represented him whose petty tyranny had clouded all my childhood, and I, who for so long had been oppressed, had turned oppressor, subtly to inflict a wound for every one I had received. But does that excuse? It is easy to account for those stains within ourselves by such judicious cleansing. Nor is it for me to argue with a master-mind of science but—this I know. I was my own worst enemy, not hers. For the hundred hurts I dealt her, I have paid.

* * *

Not until Jubilee year did Mimi and I meet again. She had been home from time to time, usually during August when we were away. Mike and Mitzi went over to Paris to see her whenever they could, and I heard news of her from them, but after that first year of her absence she ceased to write to me although I wrote to her. She did, however send me a greeting-card each Christmas.

Mitzi showed me photographs. Mimi was always being photographed in ballet dress, her arms outstretched, her eyes upturned, her body balanced on one toe that a breath might blow it over. How could she have stood so long almost, as it seemed, on air? Mimi was now a 'professional' dancer. She had led the Corps de Ballet in the Paris Opera and at Berlin, Vienna.

"She is truly *artiste*," Mitzi said, "she lives only for her art. She will have a gr-r-eat future. I know it—me! She works. But how she works!"

And then I was told how she had been promoted to leader of the Corps de Ballet in St Petersburg and had attracted the notice of a 'verree, verree great person'—none other, or so I was led to believe, than the Czar of all the Russias.

That was two years ago. She had been in Paris ever since, and from all accounts had made triumphal progress. She was no longer Mimi O'Connor but 'Māritzka.' The photographs that Mitzi showed me were displayed in shop windows on Paris boulevards. She earned a salary of fifty pounds a week. She gave Mitzi a sealskin coat and Mike a cheque. "But he put it in the fire," Mitzi told me, "he will not take money from his daughter. What a fool, yes? He who grumbles that he has to teach—he could now *pick* his pupils from the dummerheads. But he is proud. I think he silly. I tell Mimi send *me* the cheques then, I take them and save them in the bank for raining days."

And now Mimi was coming to London to dance at the Opéra Comique. I was almost as excited as Mitzi at the prospect of seeing her again, and yet I dreaded meeting her. Would she remember me? Perhaps she wouldn't want to be friends with anyone so unimportant. She, who was such a celebrity, only a year older than I, but how much older she must be in experience. Mitzi recounted tales of admirers, proposals from an English lord, a French vicomte, an American millionaire—and I was not yet 'out.'

Belle had undertaken to launch me that season. There was talk of presenting me, too, an honour not vouchsafed to either of my sisters until after their marriage. Both, however, having attained a back-door access to that community of snobs known as the Upper Ten, Laura by virtue of her husband's baronetcy—he had recently succeeded to the title—and Belle, by way of her father-in-law's beer, which for some inexplicable reason was permitted entrance where wine and cigars were taboo—they were graciously disposed to hoist me with them up the social ladder.

I cannot say I was elated at the prospect of my debut. The few 'young people's' dances I had so far been permitted to attend seemed to me tepid, dull affairs. My partners, callow youths with incipient moustaches, spotty chins and an average intelligence of morons, did not inspire me with much hope for my future. Marriage, I knew, could be the only one alternative to eternal spinsterhood, a life confined within those four walls of our house, shared with my father and Selina. Such I was convinced would be my fate, unless—as sometimes I dared wildly to dream—I might break loose—might take myself away, cajole some money out of Grandpa, enough to live on that I shouldn't starve, and eke out a bare existence teaching music. But what madness! How could I teach music? I had no method and no patience;

I should scream at my pupils as sometimes I screamed at Selina when she sang. No, I knocked the idea of music-teaching on its head. What else, then, could I do? I had not studied long enough or seriously enough to earn a living on the concert platform. I was very far indeed from concert pitch. I might tour the provinces and play at second-rate halls, if by sheer bluff I could get an occasional engagement, for I could always give a showy enough performance to impress the uninitiated, and I would at least be independent and free. That was what I wanted—to be free: not for ever tied to that house in the Terrace like a dog to its kennel. How I chafed at my confinement, and how I regretted that I had not worked at my music enough to effect an escape. If I had worked as I ought to have worked, I, too, might have been famous like Mimi. And now it was too late.

"I can't blame ye for the livin' sin ye are," Mike told me once, "am I not that way meself? We're both bone lazy. Never mind that we're gifted. Put it aside. The gods have been kind to be cruel. . . . Come now, and I'll tell ye a tale. There was a child born in my country, with feastin' and dancin' and jollification at his christenin', and presently comes to the babe where he lies in his cot, a couple from the Hills, a man and woman. The man he kissed the child and he said I'll give ye music that ye heart shall not want all the years of your life nor yet be lonely. And then the woman—it would be a woman to curse him, bad cess to her!—she made on the head o' the babe the sign o' the Black Pig of the Valley than which there is nothing more heathen. So what in the name of Darkness can a man do at all that is marked from his birth with the sign o' the Pig? For there must always be a battle in his soul against the badness of the sloth in him. And if ye don't believe the truth I'm tellin' ye, then go ask me old Ant Cathleen at me home in County Sligo. She'll vouch for it. She's living still and long past eighty, and she was there that day and saw those Two with her own squint eye that has more in it than mortal sight. . . ."

Which comforted me much; for if Mike confessed to being lazy so could I.

Mimi had been home a week before I saw her. She was always out when I went to Gayton Road for my lessons—rehearsing, Mike said, for the ballet in which she would appear as the star. Then, one morning she came upon me while I sat at the piano waiting for Mike. I was playing and didn't know that she was in the room until I felt rather than saw her there,

and stopped my strumming of that much too hackneyed 'Liebestraum' of Liszt.

She stood framed in the doorway, small and lovely, far lovelier than any photograph that I had seen. I knew she was Mimi only by her eyes—the same dark burning blue. They had not changed.

She was so much a woman, while I was still a child, ungrown and undeveloped. She wore a dress of that fashionable new striped silk and a small white high-crowned hat with a curled, drooping feather, whiter for the blackness of her hair. I saw the sparkle of a jewel in the lace at her throat, and all about her was a fragrance like a lily.

She spoke, with a gleam of white teeth between lips artificially reddened, in a stranger's voice with a slight foreign lilt. Her inflection rather than her accent was un-English.

"But, please—do not stop playing. I did not mean to interrupt. I thought it was my father here." And she thought me just another of his pupils. She didn't recognize me. Had I, too, changed so much?

She turned to go. I called her on a breath. "Mimi! It is Mimi—isn't it?"

Her eyes under the tilted hat brim searched my face, a little puzzled, her lips still faintly smiling. "Why it is—it must be—Jenny! How stupid of me not to guess." She ran to me, laughing, and took my hands, and kissed me on both cheeks. "Fancy not to know you! And how well you play! Let me look at you—yes! Just the same Jenny. Not even grown up. But I didn't expect to find Jenny grown up. I think of you always in that blue pinafore you used to wear with egg-stains on it. Mine was red—do you remember? And Sir Joshua, and Mouzel, and our Mad Tea-Parties? And poor old Punch—I cried for a week when Mitzi wrote to tell me he was dead of old age. Jenny!"

I stood there, blinking at her. So she did think of me—always. I had no words, but she could speak for both of us.

"Why do you play that awful 'Liebestraum'? Are you in love? All people play the 'Liebestraum' when they are in love. Liszt wrote it for his lover when he was very young. I met Liszt in Paris last year just before he died. It was too much for him, that visit to London and Paris. He was so old. They went mad for him in Paris."

I stood agape. She had known Liszt! . . . She rattled on: "So Mike has been teaching you all this time. I hear you are very

accomplished, but you should have begun years and years ago. What a shame that you left it so late. Mike says you have music in your heart but not in your head. You don't practise enough. But—me! How I have practised! Look at my legs." She whisked up her skirt and showed me a muscular calf in a black silk stocking. I wore silk stockings only at parties, and none so fine and transparent as this. "All my life in Paris I have worked. There is no joy in life, my dear, like work. Success is nothing but the culmination of hard work. Believe me that is true. These old sayings like genius being an infinite capacity for taking pains are right—all these old sayings are right. We like to sneer at clichés but do we ever find a truer truth instead?"

My mind could not keep pace with her. She gave the impression of concentrated swiftness, of something fluid, vital, straining to escape, as though that little body were composed of white-hot flame. It shone through the chalky pallor of her face, in her smouldering eyes; it leapt from her fingers and danced in the movements of her agile small hands. I was lost, ensnared, enraptured, filled with such a medley of emotions that for the life of me I could not then have spoken even had she given me the chance.

"Now I must r-r-run." She rolled the R on the tip of her tongue, and kissed me again. "Dear Jenny! You're so *little*. I am little, too, but you seem—littler!" She measured her shoulder against mine. "You are! Just a fraction of an inch."

"I have low heels," I muttered, painfully aware of my ankle-length skirt that exposed my last year's boots, and seemed dreadfully schoolgirlish of a sudden.

"But you are so sweet," laughed Mimi, "like a little brown mouse with big eyes—and such a lovely skin, so clear and fine. What I would not give for that complexion. Mine is *peau d'orange*—spoiled with grease-paint. But you should use just the smallest *soupçon* of face powder. Do you never use face powder?" I shook my head. She laughed again. "I think you will be a great success. You are so quiet, and you have a look of knowing so much more than you say. You smile with closed lips like Mona Lisa. You are not pretty, but who wants to be pretty? You are much, much more than pretty. *Mon dieu*, the time! Eleven o'clock and I am due at the theatre already. My hansom has been waiting half an hour. I shall be desperately late. *Au 'voir chérie*, we will meet often. You must come to my first night. Yes, I insist. You must come with Mike and Mitzi,

they will have a box. You must be there with them. I will arrange it. Afterwards I am going to give a party—you must come to that, too. *Au 'voir!*"

She was away before I knew that she had gone.

IV

BELLE had taken a house in Park Street for the Jubilee season, which promised to be the most brilliant ever known. The Queen, whose long seclusion had estranged her from her people, had now at last in the evening of her reign emerged triumphant. All antipathies, all grievances, were swept away by that splendid pageant which symbolized in one white-haired old woman the crowning summit of a golden era.

To the dazzled imagination of her subjects that aged body held within its heart the living core and spirit of the Empire. She had become the nation's idol, the Queen Bee of a matriarchal hive.

In her capital, her drones and workers swarmed to do her homage. Nothing else was talked of but the Jubilee. As the day approached all houses from the meanest hovel in the slums to the mansions of Belgravia displayed their decorations. Never in the world of fashion had there been such entertaining. Belle, with whom Laura was staying, attended balls and dinners every night, and gave one small 'young' dance for me, at which—having caught, I remember, a severe summer cold—I appeared very far from my best. That evening, however, was to prove for me significant.

Partnerless I sat with Laura among the wallflowers, and watched the whirling couples with a misanthropic eye. My head buzzed with camphor and quinine. My nose was raw with sneezes. I felt bitter.

"Pray, Jenny," whispered Laura, "do try to look more cheerful. No man will want to dance with you if you sit and scowl like that."

"Man! I haven't seen a man yet," I retorted. "Do you call these boiled shrimps men? There is nothing above twenty in the room. And I can't help my face. I know I look awful. I wish I were dead. May I go home?"

"Certainly not. When Belle has gone to all the trouble of giving a dance for you. We must try and find you a partner. There seems to be a group of unattached men by the door." She surveyed the group through a lorgnette. "Dear me!—I do believe—yes, it *is* Hugh. I thought he was at the Curragh. I will introduce him to you. He is much older than the others. Only do go and make yourself presentable first. Go to Belle's room and ask her maid for some powder—and put your handkerchief away."

"Who," I inquired, "is Hugh?"

"An old flame of mine," replied Laura archly, and ignoring my muttered rejoinder that then he *must* be old, my sister left me.

The waltz came to an end. The young ladies returned to their Mammās, the young gentlemen to the buffet. Obeying instructions I went up to Belle's room and submitted my face to her maid, who dabbed *poudre-de-riz* on my unhappy nose, and offered me a little pot of sticky red stuff. "Try a touch of this, miss, it will lighten you up wonderful."

"What is it? Paint?"

"No, Miss Jenny—the idea! Ruby salve they call it—made from vegetable."

Gingerly I dipped a finger in the pot and smeared my cheeks with scarlet.

"Gracious! What have I done? I look like a clown. Will it come off?" I rubbed my face violently with what I thought was my handkerchief, but which proved to be my glove. "And now look! Can you find me another pair? This is ruined."

"Oh dear, Miss Jenny, you should have let me." Expertly Parker repaired the damage, leaving a gentle and permanent blush. "There! That's ever so natural and pretty."

I surveyed the result in the mirror with disgust. Of all the sights! No wonder I was a wallflower. I looked painfully awkward and young. My sisters had conspired to dress me in a puritan frock of ivory satin, with a tight-fitting bodice that for all its padding did not fulfil my secret longing for a bust. My fringe, curled and plastered on my forehead, was cleverly arranged to hide my scar. But how immature and schoolgirlish I seemed, how flat my chest, how narrow my hips—"How old would you think I am, Parker?"

"Oh, ever so young, miss. Not above sixteen. You'll last for years yet."

"What, looking like this?"

"Most ladies want to look young, Miss. You'll grow old soon enough."

I hoped so indeed. If only I were elegant and colourful and tall, with a commanding presence and a bosom. Not so fine a bosom as Selina's perhaps, that was going to extremes, but curves, to show I was a woman. I would not mind being little if only I had curves, and raven hair like Mimi's, and dark blue, burning eyes. But my eyes were an uninteresting brown, my hair mousy, and my nose turned up and my mouth—there was nothing much wrong with my mouth or my teeth. I stretched my lips—yes, my teeth were perfect, like Papa's. I ought to practise smiling. . . .

"Don't you worry about your looks, miss," Parker said. "You mark my words, you'll take."

"Take what?"

"Oh, Miss Jenny!" Parker giggled. "Take—that's to say with the gentlemen. It's not always the beauties what gets the most attention."

I hoped sincerely she was right, but judging by my empty programme I rather felt she must be wrong. Still, what did it matter how I looked at this silly dance, and for the stupid boys who dragged me round the room, treading on my toes, and saying, "Aw—are you going to the Jubilee?" Every one of the few with whom I had already danced asked that. Thereafter conversation was confined to the number of balls one had been to that season, if I preferred the polka to the waltz, or if I had seen the new play by Oscar Wilde, 'The Ideal Husband,' which was the talk of the town.

Little did they guess, and how their eyes would have popped if I had told them, that forty-eight hours hence I would be watching my friend Maritzka, dancing on the stage of the Opéra Comique. Yes! how they would stare, those spotty youths, if they knew I was on familiar terms with a ballerina, which was much more shocking than being on familiar terms with an actress.

I had been greatly exercised as to how I could evade my father's vigilance and be present on the occasion of Mimi's London début. Come what may, I determined to be there. Adopting a policy of honesty is best, I had approached Papa with a clear statement of the facts and a formal invitation from Mitzi requesting that I would be permitted to attend the performance, chaperoned by her, a policy which proved to be disastrous.

The woman must be mad, I was informed, to imagine for one moment that I would be allowed to appear in public with those people. In a box. To see their daughter dance. "Dance!" Papa with horrified incredulity repeated. "Good God alive!" For all his prayers and religion, my father often took the name of his Maker in vain. "So they have a ballet dancer for a daughter. I might have known as much. This comes of consorting with Bohemians. Give them an inch and they take an ell. I credited Mrs O'Connor with more sense. She has overstepped the mark."

And so had I. Very well then. Now I knew. Since honesty had failed, I must resort again to lies. All my life I had been driven to deceit. One more black mark to my account would not unduly trouble the Recorder. Nothing short of death would hold me back from my determination to be there in that box on Mimi's first night. But how, without my father's knowledge, I could contrive to leave the house and return after midnight, was a problem so far indissoluble. All sorts of wild schemes rose in my mind to be rejected. A faked invitation to a dance? That—no, since all cards of invitation had to pass my father's censorship, and moreover I would never be permitted to attend a dance unchaperoned. I might, of course, sneak out when Papa and Selina had retired, but they seldom went to bed before eleven, and then I should miss the performance. I might have entreated Grandpapa to intervene on my behalf, but unluckily he had gone to Bath with Aunt Rosie for a cure. There seemed only one alternative—open and deliberate defiance. Go I would and brave the consequences—and Papa. At the worst he couldn't kill me.

Having come to this decision, and minus one glove, for none of Belle's was small enough to fit me, I re-entered the ballroom with faith in my unworthy self restored.

I found Laura talking to a sunburned giant with an incredible moustache, a wide expanse of shirt front, and a supercilious eye.

"Jenny, where have you been? I thought you must have gone home. Hugh—do you remember my sister Jenny? . . . Captain Titterton."

I remembered him, if he did not remember me. I think he had not altered very much. He bowed and took my programme, scribbled his initials for number fifteen—hoping, I suppose, that I would be gone long before that—returned it, and addressing space, said, "If you aren't dancing this, perhaps you would care——?"

"Thank you, I *am* dancing this," I answered quickly, piqued by his lordly assumption—none the less provoking for being perfectly correct—that I was not. He bowed, and his eyes descended to my level.

I smiled. "No," I said, "you haven't changed at all."

The golden eyebrows lifted. "Really! Have we met before?"

"Yes. At a dance."

"I am very sorry." His hand fumbled for his eye-glass; he stuck it in and looked at me as though I were an insect. "I have been away so long that I've lost touch. But, good heavens! I couldn't possibly have met you at a dance." He stressed the 'you' and shifted his examination of my face to my feet and up again. "You are too young, surely, to have been going to dances when I was home three years ago. I've only recently returned from Egypt, and I've been in Ireland ever since."

"But we did," I said coolly, "meet at a dance. Several years ago."

And I left him to think that over. Belle waylaid me as I went to take my seat by Laura.

"Jenny, I want you to play for us. This is only an informal affair so it will be quite in order. I must get you noticed somehow. I thought you knew most of the men here to night. You don't seem to be dancing at all."

"The men—as you call them—whom I happen to know, have carefully avoided asking me to dance. I am evidently not a success."

"Well, it's your own fault," Belle returned sharply, "I am sure we have done our best for you. Your dress is charming, but you don't seem to understand how to behave."

"And how," I asked meekly, "ought I to behave?"

"Don't be so tiresome. Surely to goodness you don't have to be *told* how to make yourself attractive?"

"There isn't anyone here whom I want to attract. Besides, how could anyone look attractive with a streaming cold? Why won't you let me go home?"

"Now, Jenny, please!" Belle caught my arm in a vice. "You deserve to be whipped, you're so naughty. Most ungracious and ungrateful. Here am I trying to do everything I possibly can for your advantage, and you do nothing at all to help. Now, I beg you, do as I ask. I want you to play. That at least will get you noticed. Play something showy. I will announce you now."

She went over to the hired pianist and whispered something to him. The dance, a polka, had just ended. He crashed a loud chord, called for silence, and Belle, her face full of smiles, addressed the company. "Ladies and gentlemen, the next dance will be a pianoforte solo by—Miss Jennifer Drew."

There was a polite clapping of hands. The young ladies fluttered to their seats, the young gentlemen disposed themselves in groups. A few slunk from the room, Hugh Titterton among them. A barrage of eyes followed me, as I walked across the empty floor to the piano, and asked the pianist to raise the half-open lid, and to remove the miscellany of objects that adorned it. He looked surprised. I suppose this was an unusual request for a drawing-room performer. I sat, adjusted the stool to my liking, removed my one glove, and heard a stir, a whispered chattering among the audience. They were impatient of these preliminaries. Young ladies who played the piano were not as a rule so fussy. Belle had said Play Something Showy. Very well, I would. That sneaking exodus of men had made me sore.

The opening bars of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody silenced the murmurs behind me. Showy indeed, and always fool-proof. Glancing round I saw the stragglers returning, felt rather than saw the jiggling heads, the involuntary sway of startled bodies, the spasmodic jerk of shoulders to that insistent muffled call, until, like the wild beating of a madman's heart, comes the full force of the crescendo and I hurled myself into the frenzied rhythm, and played with all my strength and all my might. My blood was up.

Mike used to say that Rhapsody, though not caviare, was at least calomel to the general. It acted like a purge on the emotions of performer and audience alike. A few years later that abandoned song pest 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay,' sweeping through London music-hall to continental boulevards, was to have a similar effect. In the pause that always followed the finale, the hired pianist leaned over diffidently to inquire, "Pardon me, miss, are you a professional?"

I shook my head.

"I've never heard an amateur play the Rhapsody like that.

It's not a piece for the amateur. The concert platform's lost a star in you, miss, if you'll excuse my——"

The din of applause drowned the remainder of his words. Shouts of "Encore!" rose above the genteel clapping of gloved hands. I left my seat to return to the wallflowers'

bench. My way was blocked. A voice said, "You're simply marvellous!"

I looked up; Captain Titterton was looking down. Compliments buzzed. The uproar continued, young gentlemen clamoured and young ladies gushed. The chaperons began to look uneasy. I was attracting far too much attention to myself. I glanced at Belle; her eyebrows telegraphed a message, "Play again."

I was escorted back to the piano by Hugh Titterton.

"What amazing power in those little hands! How can anything so small possess such force?"

I smiled. There was never any answer to these sort of questions which some one or other would unfailingly ask whenever I played the Rhapsody. I followed it up with the Chopin waltz in A flat and then, feeling the eyes of the chaperons like red-hot gimlets on my back, I dashed into the 'Blue Danube,' and bade the cluster of young men around me, "Take your partners for this dance, and I will play it for you."

Belle came to whisper: "You did splendidly. It was tactful of you to start them dancing again. Do you know my little sister, Captain Titterton?"

"Not as well as I would like to know her. I am completely overwhelmed."

Belle gave her tinkling laugh. "Really, Captain Titterton, do remember that Jenny has only just left the schoolroom. You mustn't turn her head."

"I think she is more likely to turn mine."

Dear me! A very different story.

"May I have this dance, Miss Jenny?"

"This is mine I think, Miss Drew."

"Are you engaged for the supper-dance?"

"May I have the pleasure——"

I was surrounded.

From afar my sisters beamed approval on their duckling who had turned before their eyes into a swan. Yet how, inwardly, I did despise myself, exploiting my music on the market in blatant competition with those who had nothing but their obvious allurements to offer up for sale. I was the choicer, more exclusive model. Good heavens! Had I sunk so low as that? . . . What would Mike have said could he have heard that vulgar, over-emphasized performance, a firework display to catch the crowd and earn the admiration of those tow-haired, pimply youths—and Captain Titterton.

I waltzed with Captain Titterton, whose step for all his height went perfectly with mine.

"You dance almost as divinely, as you play. Now tell me, won't you, where we've met before?"

"I have told you—at a dance."

"If I had ever met you—anywhere—I could never have forgotten."

"But apparently," I answered him, "you have."

When the dance was over, instead of returning to Laura, he led me to the conservatory. We sat on a settee behind a palm. I thought this rather shocking. It had been drilled into me so often by my sisters that I must never allow a man to take a liberty, that although I was not at all sure what dire offence might come under such a heading, I thought that sitting out in a conservatory would be at least considered—incorrect.

Belle had lectured me *ad nauseum* on points of good behaviour. "Let the men do all the talking and you listen. Nothing flatters a man more than a good listener. Some of the prettiest girls have spoiled their chances by talking too much. Don't try to be clever. Men fight shy of the blue stocking. And remember, if they talk politics you must agree with their views and never air your own."

"But," I demurred, "what if I don't agree with their views?"

"What do you mean—don't agree? You know nothing about politics, so, of course, you must agree. No girl of your age is supposed to know anything at all, except how to make herself agreeable to young men."

I reflected that I might as well be labelled This Side Up With Care, for all this fuss and palaver of coming out made me feel uncommonly like a parcel, neatly packed in tissue-paper, tied with string and left in the General Post Office ready for delivery to an unknown destination. The fates alone could tell what that would be. But once started on my journey I must ultimately arrive at the end of it, unless I fell out—by the way.

Seated with Hugh Titterton in the conservatory, some such thought as this was in my mind. How trivial, how narrow were the limitations of a girl's life and purpose. Marriage, husband, children—but surely were these not enough? What more could one ask as a *raison d'être* for one's existence? "Better a bad husband," Belle used to say, "than no husband at all." And for me, whose home was for ever shadowed by Dictatorship, what other hope had I of escape? I had read, perhaps had dreamed of love—a lover. One to whom I could give myself and all of

Me in a complete surrender; one between whom and I there were no secrets of mind or heart or flesh. One with whom as surely as the stream runs to the river, and the river to the sea, I would be merged, possessed, fulfilled . . . but not in ball-room contacts, not in the effervescence of the dance and talk as light as swansdown, would I find him. Perhaps I would never find him in this mock world of white young martyrs, where already beneath the sparkling rhythm of the waltz I seemed to hear a melancholy echo of lost laughter, of spring's gladness gone, of summer's glory fading, to lie at last in withered drifts of autumn leaves, forgotten. I shivered.

"Are you cold?" asked Captain Titterton, passing his arm along the back of the settee behind my shoulder.

"I have a cold," I said, "and if you sit so close to me I am afraid that you may catch it."

He laughed. "How original you are! But I must really know where I have met you, and when."

"Eight years ago," I said, "in my father's house—at a party. It was an unlucky night for me. I fell downstairs, and cut my head."

"By Jove! Really? So you are *that* little girl. You are not much bigger now. Yes, of course I remember. And my cousin Charles—he was a medical student, then—attended you until the doctor came."

Charles! In a flash I saw him there before me, with his mop of lion-coloured hair, his laughing eyes and his teasing voice, 'Jenny-for-short.'

"Is he your cousin? Where is he now? Is he a doctor?"

"Yes—of sorts. Somewhere in the East End, I believe. He has not done very well for himself, he has no ambition. But don't let us talk of Charles—I want to talk of you." He looked me over. "You know, you really are rather extraordinary. You are such a baby, and yet you play," his eyes narrowed, "as though you had experienced—every emotion."

I edged away as he edged nearer.

"I played very badly to-night. I play better than that when I am alone."

"Will you play for me some day when you are alone?"

"I would not be allowed to."

"Don't you ever do what you are not allowed to?"

"Oh, yes, but not—that sort of thing."

"Not what sort of thing?" I felt my cheeks redden under his

look that seemed to undress me to my skin. "What secrets, I wonder, are hidden behind that little closed smile of yours? Are you always so serious? Do you never laugh?"

"Yes, when I am amused."

"You are not amused now? I am boring you."

"Oh, no!" I remembered Belle's instructions. "But, please, don't talk about me any more."

"Then what shall we talk about?"

I smiled again, and said, "You."

After that it was easy. He had all to tell me of himself. He, with his regiment, had been sent to the relief of Gordon at Khartoum and had arrived too late. "A most damnable—you must excuse the expression, Miss Jenny—but it really was the most damnable mismanagement on the part of Gladstone."

"Poor Mr Gladstone," I said, "everybody seems to abuse him, and I am sure he does his best. After all he is a very old man, isn't he?"

"Old, yes, but still, that's no excuse for criminal negligence." He gave a hitch to the crossed knee of his creaseless trouser. "But we mustn't talk politics to little girls like you, must we? What!"

"Are we talking politics?" And if we were, I couldn't help it. I wanted to hear more. "Tell me what happened when you arrived at Khartoum."

"There is nothing much to tell."

But all the same he gave me a vivid enough account of that terrible anticlimax to a nine months' siege, and my imagination intensified the picture. I could see that deserted fort at the gates of the doomed city, the smouldering ruins and the desert, a dim yellow ocean stretching far beyond human sight; I could feel the scorching heat, could smell the stench of putrefying bodies. I shuddered. "War," I cried, "is a sin against life, against God."

He turned to me astonished. "You are very impressionable. Have I alarmed you with my description?"

"No, but it seems so dreadful that we who are supposed to be a civilized people can permit such horrors to happen. For what cause? Is it for honour and glory?"

"For the expansion of our Empire," said Captain Titterton, expanding his chest as if the glory of the Empire lay within it, "than which there is no greater cause on earth."

"But what cause can possibly justify the murder of human beings, no matter what their race or colour? Men are not animals—not beasts——" Captain Titterton's elevated eyebrows pulled

me up. I was airing my views, and what views—to a soldier! I had presumed too far. Captain Titterton evidently thought so. "But of course," I floundered, foolishly, "I have no right to speak like this. I know nothing about men or war or anything."

He bent his head, his glance wavered to dive into my eyes. He muttered, "By God, I'd like to teach you!" And before I could prevent him his arm was round my waist, his moustache was in my mouth, and his hot lips crushing mine against my teeth. Utterably shocked, I wrenched myself away from him and struggled to my feet. I stood appalled. So this—this unwarranted attack must be a liberty. My temper rose. And so did he.

"How could"—I gasped—"how *could* you be so awful!" Burning, I rubbed my lips to take away the touch of his. "What a simply vile thing to do. You must be mad." He certainly looked queer, so hot and red and flustered. "And don't make matters worse, there's no excuse." For he was stammering apologies and more than ever scarlet.

"I didn't mean," he mumbled, "to offend."

"You have," I answered, scorchingly, "offended."

A ridiculous scene, but the storm of emotion it aroused was not ridiculous. For the first time in my life a man had kissed me. I was conscious of vague tremors, less disturbing than delicious, sprung from some unconfessed and secret fount that both stirred and yet profoundly shamed me.

I refused his proffered escort to the ball-room. "Thank you, I prefer to go alone. I never wish to see or speak to you again." But even while I said it, I felt my vehemence to be a little overdone.

He bowed; I passed, with a wrathful swirl of skirts, and went, not to the ball-room, but upstairs to fetch my cloak. When I came down a few couples were dancing the last gallop. Belle, busy with her duties, receiving the thanks and farewells of her young guests, took no account of me; nor was Laura to be seen, but her husband stood talking to Guy Haddon in the hall. I bade them both good night and received a brotherly kiss upon my forehead. "Well, chicken, have you enjoyed yourself?"

I told him yes, immensely. "And please, Guy, say good night to Belle and thank her for me."

I was anxious to escape. From the corner of my eye I had seen someone approaching.

The butler opened the hall door and called for Miss Drew's carriage. I walked out—and was followed.

"Am I to be forgiven?"

"No."

"What, never?"

I was dumb.

"May I call to-morrow?"

"Kindly oblige me by standing on one side, Captain Titterton. I wish to get into the brougham."

"Will you allow me to escort you home? You should not drive alone at this hour of the night."

"It is already morning, and I am in the care of my father's coachman."

I stepped into the carriage; the butler shut the door. Hugh Titterton spoke through the window.

"Is this then to be good-bye?"

For answer I jerked up the window; the brougham moved off. I lifted the leather flap that shielded the strip of glass let into the padding behind me. He stood bareheaded on the kerb with the light of a street lamp full on his face, and a smile on those lips whose touch, for all I had erased it, still burned on my own.

The carriage turned a corner and I lost him. I stared through that narrow eyelet at a lavender sky and paling stars above dim roof-tops. A veiled greyness slid along the empty street.

"May I call to-morrow?" . . . And to-morrow was to-day!

* * *

Yet in spite of masculine encounter and the disconcerting palpitations it aroused, I slept the clock round. It was long past noon when Dowson wakened me with tea and an announcement.

"A gentleman sent these, miss, and asked to see you. Hood told him you were still in bed and so he went away and said he would call later."

"Who? What?"

Memory returned with a heavy consciousness of cold. My head ached and I shivered. My throat was sore; I sneezed. I had no interest in gentlemen. I was more concerned with my condition. If I felt so shocking now I might be worse to-morrow night, and come what may, I *must* be well to-morrow night, for Mimi's début.

"Look, miss," Dowson, her oyster-eyes agog, presented roses. "Don't they smell lovely?"

She put the bunch to my nose. I said: "I can't smell with

this cold. I'm afraid I'm really ill now. I ought not to have gone to that hellish dance."

"Oh, Miss Jenny, what a thing to say! And a gentleman after you already."

Dowson's flabby face expressed a furtive envy. I stared at her until her smile faded. "Put them in water, please. I shall not get up to-day."

"But, miss, the gentleman is coming back."

"I can't help that. Ask Mrs Drew if she will kindly let me have her thermometer. I want to take my temperature."

"Yes, miss." She handed me an envelope. "And here's a note for you as well."

It was brief and scrawled in pencil on his card. "I deserve everything you say—or have not said. I humbly beg forgiveness. I cannot altogether blame myself. I think you have bewitched me—with your music."

Well! He hadn't lost much time.

Dowson returned with a thermometer and a message from Selina. She would not come to my room as she did not wish to catch my cold. She was going out to-morrow night and would be asked to sing.

"She is going out"—I squealed—"to-morrow night? Is Papa going too?"

"I couldn't say, miss, I'm sure." Dowson gave me her cold, fishy look. "Do you want him to?"

I restrained my eagerness. Fool that I was! If Dowson suspected any motive in my questions then I knew my game was up. She was paid to spy on me, and most worthily did she fulfil her duties. My repeated threats had ceased to carry weight.

I put the thermometer in my mouth and counted the seconds on my fingers. . . . As I thought, my temperature was up to 101 degrees. A pretty how-do-you-do. I would have to ask the doctor for a dose to bring it down. I told Dowson to send for him at once.

"Are you really ill, Miss Jenny, and not shamming?"

"What do you mean, shamming? Why should I sham illness?" She, for all her flabbiness, was sharp.

"One never knows with you, miss, what mischief you'll be up to," was Dowson's dispassionate rejoinder.

"Kindly do as you are told, and fetch the doctor. If he cannot come at once he must come as soon as he can. I am probably sickening for something infectious."

Dowson precipitously backed.

"It might," I murmured, "possibly be smallpox."

Dowson receded to the door."

"Miss Jenny! Have you been near anyone with smallpox?"

The immediate success of my ruse spurred me to further effort.

"Will you promise not to sneak to Papa if I tell you that I have?"

"Well, miss——"

"Promise, Dowson. Remember I have never sneaked on you."

"Miss, it isn't fair," protested Dowson, looking all ways but at me. "It isn't reelly!"

I smiled.

"You had better promise, Dowson. How many times have I done my own hair and put away my own clothes so that you could go off and meet your young man in the evenings? You don't seem very successful with your young men, do you, Dowson? You ought to have been married to one of them long ago. I am afraid you allow them to take liberties."

I watched her doughy cheeks turn red.

"I'm surprised at you, miss."

"Oh, no, Dowson, you are not. Nothing I can say or do surprises you. We understand each other. We, Dowson, are sisters in sin. We will both burn hereafter—and probably together. What a prospect, Dowson! You and I eternally roasting in each other's company, sharing the same grill and the same demon."

"How can you talk so 'orrible, Miss Jenny!"

I leaned back against my pillows with closed eyes.

"Dowson," I muttered, "I am ill, very ill. I am roasting. I burn. Poor Mr O'Connor, with that rash all over him. Caught from his cousins just over from Ireland. Simply covered in bursting scabs. Comes on so quickly too—first a cold—then a fever——"

"Miss Jenny!" shrieked Dowson, "what nonsense are you talking?"

I opened one eye. "Is this nonsense? Then may I never speak again. Fetch the doctor—and mind, Dowson, that you breathe no word of this to any living soul, for so surely as you do——" I pointed a dramatic finger. "you will be damned! Now go." And as she bolted through the door, I called after her. "And don't come back!"

Nor did she: for in spite of the doctor's assurance that I was suffering from nothing more infectious than a cold, Dowson kept her distance from my room. The housemaid, Alice, waited on me in her stead. So far so good. With the oyster-eye of Dowson

removed from my vicinity, I felt I was progressing. In Alice, who had known me since my nursery days, I might even be persuaded to confide.

Next morning while Alice dusted she regaled me with the story of how Dowson had come down to the kitchen full of me and my 'goings-on.' "Of course, miss, we knew that you'd been 'avin her on toast. You're a born tease, Miss Jenny, for all you look so innocent and quiet. But Dowson never sees a joke. She's taken all for gospel what you'd said. She says she saw you with her own eyes turning green and ravin'. Then Cook went and told 'er that the smallpox first shows itself on the stomach. And now she's spendin' 'arf the day undressin' of 'erself to find the rash."

From which I knew that I would be safe from Dowson. But I had yet to reckon with Papa. Was he or was he not accompanying Selina? He had visited me in the morning before leaving for the office, and although my temperature, thanks to the doctor's dose, was normal now, Papa had ordered me to remain in bed. "A little is cured with a little. My Poor Mother died of a neglected cold." His eyes alighted on the roses by my bedside. "And who, may I ask, sent you these?"

As I saw no reason to withhold the truth, I told him. It had a marked effect.

"Dear me! So you have managed to secure an admirer." And I realized that he was not displeased. "God willing, I may not after all have you on my hands for life."

With which amiable reflection he departed.

At lunch-time Alice brought me the hopeful news that neither the master nor the missis would be in to dinner.

"Papa too! Alice, are you sure?"

"Why, yes, Miss Jenny, Blanche told me. Missis is going to dine with her relations and the master is going to a Freemasons' dinner."

So fate had lent a hand. I dispatched Alice with a hurried note to Mitzi explaining my predicament, and asking her not to wait for me if I were late. Alice returned with an incoherent scribble.

"Ask in the foyer if not there. You will be brought in the box. Mimi is resting. I sick all day with nerves for her but she is calm."

After that there was nothing more to do but wait in a fever of impatience for the evening.

Dusk fell, and with it—in her room across the landing—the stir and chatter of Selina at her toilet. My ears strained for every

murmur, every footstep of the maid who plied back and forth from wardrobe to dressing-table. Presently I heard Papa's tread on the stair. How long before *he* would be ready? Selina's door opened; she went into Papa's room next to mine. Chat, chat, chatter . . . and Papa's booming voice, "I shall probably be home later than you, but I shall not disturb you. I will sleep here. Good night, my love."

It was now past seven, and the curtain rose at eight. I would have to miss the first half of the performance, but that would not matter because Mimi had told me that she did not appear until the second half of the programme which was divided between opera and ballet. But I must be there by ten. And how could I possibly be there by ten? . . . O God, I prayed, let me be there by ten. Why can't Papa be quicker? What can he be doing? Will he never go? . . . Alice brought me my dinner on a tray. I made a pretence of eating it to please Cook, who had sent me up a sole with mushroom sauce and my favourite chocolate *mousse*. It almost choked me. Eight o'clock already. And here was Alice come to light the gas and draw the curtains. Now surely Papa must go. At whatever hour did these Freemasons begin to eat? And did they eat all night that he had said he would be late? Suppose we both returned at the same time? I thrust the thought to the back of my mind. Let me get out first, before worrying as to what might happen when I came in.

"Are there no servants in this house?" Ah, that was better, he was shouting for Hood. He must surely be ready to go. "I have rung a dozen times. Has the brougham returned, or must I take a cab? . . . Then I shall have to take a cab. Fetch me a cab. And bring me a brush. Are you supposed to have brushed this suit?"

What a business it was to get him off, and always the same fuss. But to-night it seemed interminable. He would stay for ever being brushed by Hood and storming. God! Make him go!

He put his head round the door to bid me, "Don't sit up reading all hours to ruin your eyesight." The sound of hoofs halting outside the house hastened my father below. The front door slammed. The hansom drove off with a jingle of bells. I rang mine.

"Yes, miss?"

"Alice, I am feeling very tired. I think I shall go to sleep now. Please bring me a can of hot water."

"Will you be wanting anything more, miss? A hot drink?"

"Nothing more, thank you." I scrambled back into bed. "And on no account do I wish to be disturbed."

"Yes, miss."

"Alice, what time do you go to bed as a rule?"

"All times, miss. Ten—eleven——"

Eleven! Not possible.

"But surely not so late to-night? You need all the rest you can get while you can get it. You look shockingly pale and tired. You *must*, Alice—go to bed early. And Cook too—and Hood—and the others. Tell them *all*," I said wildly, "to take the night off—I mean to go to bed early. Good night."

"Good night, miss," returned Alice, surprised, I think, by this unwonted solicitude.

It would be easy enough to get out, but how was I going to get in? My only way of entrance was through the window of my basement room, and that must be unlatched before I left the house. Not until the maids had gone to bed could I attempt to unbar the shutters. I dared not risk being locked out, and suppose they should choose to sit up till eleven? By Papa's order it was a standing rule that Hood should make a tour of inspection last thing at night to see that all was barred and bolted.

Frantically I began to dress. No easy task without the assistance of a maid; however, I managed to struggle into everything except my bodice, and that I had to leave unhooked. Mitzi or someone would have to do it up for me, or I could sit in my cloak. That was the least of my troubles. It was now half-past nine and I—half-demented. Would those wretched maids never go to bed? What on earth could they be doing? I raved in front of my looking-glass, taking down my hair a dozen times and putting it up again until it looked like a bird's nest. For all her faults, Dowson had her uses. . . . Now I heard a whispering, a creaking on the stairs. Thank heaven, they were going to bed. Cook first: none but she could tread so heavily. The others followed—all but Blanche, who must wait up for Selina in her bedroom. There was a distant banging overhead—then silence.

I slipped a purse into my pocket, seized my cloak, turned down the gas and noiselessly opened the door. A light came from under Selina's. I could hear Blanche humming as she moved about. Holding my skirts I sped down the stairs to the basement, stood on a chair to unfasten the barred shutters and unlatch the french window, leaving it slightly ajar. A clock chimed the quarter

as I ran up the stone stairs to the hall. The front door was unbolted. I slipped out and closed it softly behind me. And now I was in the Terrace, my cloak over my arm, my bodice gaping wide with a cold breeze down my naked back. Not a soul, not a policeman in sight. The primrose glare of gas-lamps faded beneath the light of the risen moon, that gleamed white on the roof-tops and flung a shadow on the pavement black as a witch's shawl.

I flung my cloak around my shoulders and, lifting my skirts in both hands, began to run. No time to wait for a cab. I must run till one passed me. I had not gone fifty yards before I heard the jingle of a hansom as it turned the corner of the Square. A hansom! I knew it was a deadly sin for a girl to drive alone in a hansom, but having dared so far, I could dare further. I halted on the pavement, and called, "Cabby!"

The cab stopped; the driver peered; a street lamp showed me his red face, his leering grin.

"Where for, dear? The Empire?"

"The Opéra Comique. Have the goodness to drive quickly. I will give you double your fare if you get me there before half-past ten."

"'Op in."

I hopped in. The doors swung shut. The driver lifted the trap in the roof and approached a bloodshot eye, to say: "Bit orf yer beat, ain't yer?"

Beat? What could he mean? And were all cabmen so familiar? I had never driven alone in a cab before, and as for a hansom! Suppose I should be seen? But who would ever see or recognize me in the dark? I pulled the hood of my cloak over my head and face and held it so that only my eyes were visible. Now I was safe. And the cab bowling smartly along the Bayswater Road, past Grandpapa's house and so to Marble Arch.

If it had not been for my anxiety lest I should arrive too late for Mimi's entrance, I would have enjoyed that drive through the lively streets of the West End. One could see so much more from a hansom cab than from a closed carriage. The lights of Piccadilly seemed to wink with a jocular hilarity at the mashers in evening dress, at the ladies strolling singly, unattended. So it seemed a lady *could* walk out alone at night in the West End if she were married, for I presumed that all those ladies must certainly be married. One day perhaps I too would be married, then I could do as I liked and walk the streets and drive alone in hansom cabs, without any fear of sinning.

In Leicester Square we were held up by a policeman to allow pedestrians to cross. The traffic was more congested here, the streets swarming with flash men and overdressed women; street-vendors shouting their ware in the gutter, old hags with trays of toys or matches; pickpockets, rogues and a cordon of drunken young rowdies, arms linked, singing that dreadful song heard then for the first time, as so often afterwards I was to hear it . . .

“And now we’re going to hell, going to hell,
And now we’re going to hell, going to hell,
And now we’re going to hell,
But what a —— sell,
If you go there as well .
Damn your eyes!”

Suddenly, from among that brief confusion of impressions, one took more potent form, to strike at vision with a nightmare shock. I saw, and did not see . . . I was mistaken, or I dreamed, that face, that smile; not the same familiar dreaded smile known to me. This rakish grin fixed between immaculate gold-brown moustache and beard, this sly, abandoned devil-of-a-fellow sort of grin, this foolish, tipsy grin—was nothing of my father—and yet all of him. For he was there, standing, slightly swaying on the kerb beside my hansom: so near we could have touched, so near we could have spoken, so near that his sight could not perceive for it was gone beyond the consciousness of me, or of that world to which both he and I were chained, and from which he, also, had escaped. And in that moment while I cowered in the shelter of my hood, I knew a wild kinship with this fugitive who slunk with lies out of his house to meet his woman. She clung to him, a painted, tawdry creature, in glittering array, bare-necked, bare-armed, a cape around her shoulders, sham jewels in her hair; and she leered into his face, as the driver of the cab had leered in mine.

I shuddered and felt sick, physically and urgently sick. My gorge rose, and I ducked my head and held my breath until the spasm passed—until that pair had crossed the road to vanish through a dark and narrow doorway.

The policeman dropped his outstretched arm, the driver flicked his whip and that drunken song roared up into my ears:

“And now we’re going to hell,
But what a bloody sell,
If you go there as well. . . .”

The cab moved on.

Strange, looking back upon that night, though half a century has blurred it, how that one incident among all others stays detached, a sinister high-light in a tangle of emotional concussions. Yet every moment of that evening is vibrant still. Nothing is lost; nothing of memory but sleeps to be awakened at a touch, a word, a whisper. For to us who tread the downward years the shrouded past draws nearer, and all of youth—its hopes, its fears, its gay extravagance, its wistful yearning is here again within our thoughts of those who wait beyond the edge of time. . . .

Hugging my cloak about me and woefully aware of my half-dressed appearance, I was conducted to the door of the stage box. From a huddle of craning shapes, one rose to receive me: Mike’s growl, “Sit ye down. She’s on——” silenced my apologies. A chair was offered and I sat. Mitzi’s hand came out to clutch at mine. The dazzle of lights from the stage etched her eager, pale profile clear against the dim background of the crowded house. The orchestra was playing something unknown to me—a Weberesque trifle—but not Weber. I heard Mike muttering behind me, “Muck! But look at her, will ye! Look at her!”

And I dared not look at her.

For in this last and longed-for moment at such risk achieved, I sought perversely to prolong anticipation, before my sight surrendered.

Her success in London never was phenomenal. She appealed more to a continental public. Until that lovely genius, Pavlova, herald of the Russian ballet, who, in those few years before the first World War had come to break all previous bounds of convention, English taste still favoured acrobatics and the saccharine contortions of trainee dolls. Mimi’s dancing was an innovation. She combined the essence of rhythm with movement. She charmed the eye to hypnotize the ear. She uplifted, she transposed that trashy music until it seemed the purest melody. So might she have glorified a barrel-organ in the street to render sound perfection. Not here the stereotyped postures, the fixed smile masking a mechanical technique won through agonies of labour. Her art had soared above device of tortured limbs. I see her now . . .

She seems to float: her feet are surely winged, she is incorporate, a sprite, a butterfly or all things that are joyous. Do I fancy that her eyes meet mine in a second's gay conspiracy before her body lifts and quivers poised for flight? She springs into the arms of her partner—a simpering grotesque, taut muscles bulging through his flesh-pink tights. He raises her aloft to rest like a feather on his shoulder, while gauzy nymphs come drifting on their toes to form a circle and bear her on their finger-tips, away . . .

The vociferous applause from the gallery, the genteel clamour of the stalls, vied with a storm of boos and catcalls. Mike's explosive comment, "God damn their puny souls!" brought me from my trance. The curtain rose again: Mimi, her face a mask of smiles, came to take her call. She curtseyed to the boxes right and left, blew kisses to the gallery, bouquets were handed up. The people in the stalls collected wraps preparing to depart.

Mitzi spoke excitedly across me in German to a large lady in black, with a red gash of a mouth in a face that looked as though it had been dipped in flour. The gallery continued to stamp and shout, yelling down the howls of opposition. My spine crept at this dubious reception. Could it mean that Mimi was a failure? Mitzi was counting the curtains, "Three—four—*aber* Mikchen! It is better than I hoped. Five——"

"What the hell!" growled Mike. "Who cares for the murdering swine? Did I not tell you she would be wasted on 'em?"

"*Ach*, you are mad then! What more can you have than this for London? Six. But *six* curtains! That is good enough for these rosbiff and suet puddings. This is not Vienna."

The curtain fell to rise no more. The orchestra played 'God Save the Queen,' the house gas was turned up. Mike left the box.

"Jenny!" Mitzi presented me to the lady in black. "My sister, Baroness von Solberg. Mimi lives with her in Paris. *Doch Kind!* Your dress!"

In my excitement, blissfully unconscious of my gaping bodice and the shivers down my back, I had let fall my cloak and stood exposed. Their laughter drowned my mumbled explanations.

"So!" Mitzi fastened me. "Now we go behind to see her."

We followed where she led through a door at right angles to the entrance of the box, that gave access to the back of the stage. Here perspiring stage-hands were busy shifting the painted blocks of canvas; sudden apparitions in ballet skirts appeared from behind the dark recesses of the wings, mysteriously to vanish amid clouds of dust. There was a nauseating smell of

size and grease-paint. This sordid transformation from an enchanted woodland glade peopled by dancing nymphs served to increase my sense of unreality. Was there to be no end to the incredible adventures of this outlandish night? I remember arriving by way of echoing stone passages to Mimi's dressing-room and that Mitzi, bidding me wait outside, went in with the Baroness and closed the door.

For what seemed hours, but was only, I suppose, about ten minutes, I stood in that draughty corridor, listening to a clatter of voices, all speaking at once; French, German, and Mike's deep roaring bass above the din; then the pop of champagne corks and a great to-do of toasts, and the door burst open and out came Mike, followed by a troupe of the oddest people I had ever seen. First, a stout Hebraic gentleman with a black imperial and a shirt-front ablaze with diamonds, talking violent French with both hands. He, I learned afterwards, was Mimi's manager in Paris; and an exuberant lady with a mountainous chest, gaily garmented in cherry-coloured satin; and a sallow-faced man with a mane of iron-grey hair whom I recognized as the leader of the orchestra; and a young girl with a *peignoir* round her shoulders and an expanse of pink tights, who said, "I must fly"—and flew—to another dressing-room. And last, a tall, dandified youth in one of those latest evening capes, who, as I stood pressed against the whitewashed wall, turned with a slow movement of his head to look at me. His eyes, sombre, darkly shadowed, held mine for one strange moment as he passed.

I heard Mitzi calling, "Jenny, you can *komm*!"

Mimi, in a wrapper, surrounded by masses of flowers, was seated at the dressing-table removing the grease-paint from her face while Mitzi, on her knees beside her, massaged her feet and ankles. Without looking round Mimi motioned her dresser to bring me a chair, and spoke to me in the mirror.

"Darling! You did not mind waiting until all these people went? There was such an awful crush. You are coming to my party? How did you get here? We wondered how you possibly would manage it."

I told her, but I think she did not listen much. Her face emerging from the paint looked white and drawn; faint bruises of exhaustion showed beneath her eyes; I noticed that her hands were slightly shaking. She lifted them to press her ears. "There is such a noise—here—in my head. I hear always that *ta-ra-ra-ta-ra-ra* filth! If

only to God I could have danced to Schumann. I begged and begged—but no! *This* was written for me. I must dance it. So *charming!* Darling, give her some champagne. Jenny, did you like me? Do you think I danced well?"

I whispered, "I have no words to tell you——" My throat closed.

"Why, Jenny!" She jumped up from her chair to take my face between her hands, and held it smiling, but her eyes were wet. "You are trembling!" She kissed my mouth. How clinging soft her lips. "You sweet! And so I gave you something? Something real? I can see that you are *vraiment artiste*. You feel. You understand. I think they will not like me much in London. *Mais je m'en fiche de ça alors*. I have the heart of Paris and all Vienna in my toes." She rippled into laughter. "And now for the love of God, another drink. Please, Mitzi, yes! I have had nothing. And Jenny, too. She is out of herself. Tante Elsa! Take Jenny home—not to your home, *chérie*. To-night you are free for once. You promised to come to my party. I must make haste. I shall never be ready. My friends are waiting for me."

"Here then, Jenny, drink." Mitzi pushed a glass into my hand. "Prut, child! Yes, I insist, it will do you good. You are too pale. All this naughtiness—it is too much for you. Drink it quick, and then you must go."

The sparkling liquid surged and tingled through me. I was steadied. "Now hurry!" Mitzi hustled me outside. "You must go by the stage door. Tante Elsa will show you the way. You will find Mitzi's hansom waiting. My sister speaks no English, so you must tell the man to drive quickly and return here at once for us."

The drive home, after my unsuccessful attempt to speak French and still worse German to the Baroness, was conspicuous for nothing but its silence. We arrived at the O'Connors' house to find the party in full swing, the music-room crammed to capacity, and Mike dispensing drinks, while the stout lady in cherry-coloured satin entertained the audience with song. I marvelled that anything so unlovely, so grossly fat, could produce those pure exquisite sounds.

The Baroness told me her name; it was world-famous. Nor was she the only celebrity present. I recognized—from having seen her on the stage—a well-known actress, and although I did not realize it at the time, quite a few of the higher lights in art and literature were present there that night, who a few years

later were to illuminate the pages of that remarkable production *The Yellow Book*.

The dank-haired, narrow-chested boy who accompanied the *prima donna* on the piano was none other than the sixteen-year-old Aubrey Beardsley; and he, brought to the concert platform as a child prodigy, was later to relinquish his earliest influence, music, for that amazing art which entombed the *fin-de-siècle* in black and white.

I sat uncomfortably wedged upon a sofa between the Baroness and the Gallic Jew whom I had seen in the corridor of the theatre. They talked across me in rapid Parisian French, of which I understood no word, and as no one took any notice of me, I could examine this extraordinary assembly at my ease. A tall woman with tousled cropped hair, in faded blue velvet and spectacles, whom I supposed must be a lady novelist but who was actually a Hibernian peeress, stood by the piano shrilly proclaiming her views upon the Irish question to a dreamy-eyed æsthetic gentleman in a velvet coat. And he, whom I took for a poet, was a luminary of the Bar, whose meteoric career ended on the Woolsack. To him, "You condemn," the lady said, "without a hearing. You have no first-hand experience of race hatred and historic feuds. And also—you have no imagination. Because a British tenant farmer would scorn to shoot his landlord or his landlord's cattle, you do not understand how passions tormented by the smouldering flame of injustice can leap——" She looked, I thought, as though she too might leap at any moment upon her startled hearer, who retreated, backing to the fire-place, with one foot in the empty grate while she, a finger threateningly pointed, followed him. "You may," she said triumphantly, "crucify the Cause, but there will come a resurrection."

Well!

And sipping my champagne, uncomfortably fastened between the two large creatures either side of me, I became aware of a slow, but none the less acute, discomfort. The close atmosphere, the pungent smell exuding from the Baroness's armpits, to say nothing of the two glasses of wine upon my empty stomach, combined with the evening's emotions were now taking their effect. A cold dampness oozed upon my forehead. I must get out, escape, or I might faint, be sick, disgrace myself.

"*Mais, ma chère madame,*" the Frenchman leaned across me to emphasize, "*Je vous assure comme je vous ai dit——*"

Enough. I moved, I wriggled. "Please——" I gasped, "you are sitting on my dress." *Both* of them were sitting on my dress. "Was ist das, mein Kind?"

"*Mademoiselle, milles fois pardons!*"

The two great buttocks heaved and so did I; and snatched my skirt and fled, and at the door was caught by Mike. "You are not going home at all! Mimi will be back at any moment."

"It is so hot in here, I must get out for a minute in the air."

"Woman, you're white! Will I give you some brandy now?"

"No, thank you. Just—some air."

"Then walk a while in the garden. Here's Jonathan—he'll take you."

It was he whom I had seen in the corridor of the theatre. I went out into the hall; he followed to open the front door and let the blessed night air fan my face. I leaned against the wall until the cloud of dizziness passed from me.

And still neither of us spoke.

He appeared very tall to me who was so little. The gas-light gleamed on his hair—the colour of pale coffee and worn a trifle longer than was usual: his eyes took mine and held them with a deep questioning look. It was not until our second meeting that I found his eyes were blue: I had thought them almost black, so distended were the pupils, or it may have been the shadows made them seem so.

I felt his fingers light and cool upon my arm. "That room was very hot. Would you not care to go out?"

His voice, like all his movements, had a slowness with the slightest hint of a brogue, and although I did not know his name I felt that he belonged to Mike's own country, and that he too knew all the sorrows and the wisdom and the beauty of the People of the Hills. . . .

"Jenny!" Mimi, her arms full of flowers, was running up the steps. "I am so late and so hungry! I have eaten nothing all day. Jonathan!" She laid aside her bouquets and went to him to take his hands and draw his face to hers. I heard her whisper, "Thank you, darling, for your message—and your roses." And it was as if a darkness came upon me, like a breath on glass, as swiftly fading. And I was glad for her sake they were lovers: for surely he must love her and she him. There never was a pair more sweetly suited.

She turned to me, her eyes aglow, and I knew that no man could resist her.

"So you two," she said, "already know each other. I wanted you and Jonathan to meet. Jenny has been my little friend since both of us were babies. *Mon dieu!* I starve! Come with me now while I eat. Have you had supper?"

Like quicksilver she was gone, darting in and out among her guests with flying words and kisses, and where she went all followed. The music-room was emptied: the small front parlour filled. The company stood to eat and drink while Mimi sat surrounded. More wine was passed, and everybody toasted Mimi; all but Jonathan. I noticed that although he raised his glass he set it down untouched. The wine was surely in my head again to make me ask him: "Have you taken the pledge?"

"What?" His eyes came round to mine with a queer, startled look that held a sudden watchfulness, and stayed me, wondering.

"It was nothing," I faltered, "I thought perhaps—that you don't like champagne."

The moment's tension lifted.

"And do you?" His lips were smiling now. I knew he had not been aware of me or anything but Mimi. He resented this clamorous monopoly of her by others who had a lesser claim. I smiled back at him, and raised my glass.

"Yes, for the good wishes that go with it—to you—and her."

His glance strayed to the glass in my hand, and his face was closed again and guarded. A quick flush mounted to his forehead, or it may have been my fancy made me think so: in any case I had presumed too far, and could have bitten out my tactless tongue. What right had I to pry into their secret?

He turned from me abruptly to talk to Mike. I stood there lost and foolish: tired, too. The night was late. I ought to go. Several people had already gone. Mimi, her elbows on the table, punctuated a rapid flow of French exchanged between herself and her manager, with mouthfuls gnawed from a chicken bone held between her fingers. I edged my way towards her and waited for a chance to tell her: "Mimi, I must go home now."

"*Comment? Qu'est ce que tu dis? Mais non—pas encore—*not yet. It is early."

"It is late. Good night. Can I see you some time soon—alone? Perhaps to-morrow?"

"Perhaps not. I have called a rehearsal for the *corps de ballet*—they missed every entrance—it was frightful! Must you go, *chérie*? Who will take you home? Someone *must* take you home. Jonathan!" With the chicken bone she beckoned him.

"No, Mimi, please——" I kissed her ear and whispered, "I shall have to climb over the wall."

"Oh, but hear her!" She flung her head back, laughing. "She is too delicious—this one! Her father thinks I am not fit to know so she must climb over the wall to come and see me dance. But believe me, that is the greatest of all compliments. What she risks! More than her life, I think. She has an ogre of a father. I have never met him—but I remember all you used to tell me. Does he still look at you with his green eye-glass? I used to hear him roaring in your nursery."

I know she did not realize—for she, too, had taken a fair amount of wine—how much her thoughtless words embarrassed me. I could have sunk through the floor with shame of myself. What must these people from a world as far removed from mine as Mars is from this planet, think of one so lowly and so limited? My discomfiture, however, was unfounded. They were in that state when nothing said had any meaning beyond merriment. Under cover of the noise and confusion of laughter, I escaped from the room. I had left my cloak on a chair in the hall; Mimi's discarded flowers were massed upon it, giving out a dying fragrance. I wondered which were Jonathan's. There were so many roses. I took one and thrust it in the bodice of my dress; it lay there cool and soft against my skin. The door leading to the garden was ajar. I went out. . . . A night like velvet with a high, clear moon, star-crowned. Under that sleeping light all shapes were magically distorted, all shadows had a dream-solidity, all colour faded out of things, as in a world under the sea.

I stood, breathing in the peace of it, the quiet. The voices from within were muted now. The scent of lilac rose above the acrid smell of London earth, of cats, of dustbins. Our house, like some gigantic presence, cast its black shade across the ghostly grass. Not a glimmer from my father's window. Perhaps he had not yet returned. My thoughts shuddered from that festering reminder in which I dared not let imagination probe. More than the passive veils of a young girl's innocence had been torn aside by that lightning revelation. My faith in the whole structure of existence—as I knew and understood it—had been broken. I might rebel against parental discipline, I might break rules and commandments—but I still admitted the superiority of one, Jehovah-like in frightfulness and second only to the Lord Himself. One, who in desperation I defied to lose my soul. But now my

deity had crumbled; my soul was safe. A false god, smeared with gutter slime, a sneak-thief of bartered pleasure, had with one blow shattered my foundations. I lived, I had my being in a world of shams, of furtive lusts, of cheap hypocrisies. To these, then, I must bow; by all such niggling lies must I be sworn to live until I died, unless I fled to find myself again. . . .

I heard a footstep on the gravel path behind me, and I knew, before I turned to see him, who had come. In the moonlight he seemed taller still, unreal. His face, caught by those pale beams, had a strange, startling clarity; his eyes darkly smudged beneath his fair, straight brows accentuated the delicate articulation of cheek-bones above a lean, square jaw. He had a mouth too womanish for any man—a face of contradictions.

I had a feeling strong upon me that I knew him, that I had always known him, always seen him as I saw him then. I remember thinking swiftly: He is Mimi's and they love . . . and deep in me I felt an emptiness.

He said, "Are you star-gazing? I have come to take you home."

The commonplace remark jerked me back to my immediate predicament. I wondered if he too had heard Mimi's announcement to the room that I would have to climb over the wall. Perhaps he hadn't heard, and I would have to tell him. I mumbled, "Please don't trouble to do that. I live—just there." I pointed to the dark mass of our house. "I always come this way. It is quicker than walking round."

I saw the glint of a smile, and I reddened there in the darkness. What must he think? How inane—how schoolgirlish.

"May I," he drawled, "give you—a lift?"

"Oh, no, please—it is quite easy."

It was. During Selina's crusade of redecoration, the trellis had been taken down because she said it spoiled the outlook. The 'cat-run' had been cleared of its mould and weeds and paved with red brick. Dwarf orange trees that never bore an orange were ranged in peacock-green tubs against the wall that had been washed with pink, to give it what Selina called an 'Italian villa' effect. And sometimes in summer she took tea out there in continental style under an enormous red-and-white striped umbrella.

He eyed the wall ahead. "Easy for me, I've no doubt. I don't wear a skirt." And he gave a look at mine, which had I been alone I would have taken off to clamber over in my petticoat.

"It won't," I muttered, "be very much in the way." And I added firmly, "thank you," hoping he would take this as a dismissal. But not at all. He had no intention yet of going. As I moved determinedly across the grass, he paced beside me, saying:

"So there is where you live. In a house, in a Terrace, in the middle of London?"

"Yes," I said, "in prison."

That slipped out before I could prevent it, but I am not sure if he heard. We had come to the end of the garden now. He leaned against the wall looking down at me. I wondered if he could see my face as clearly as I saw his in that colourless light, or if he noticed the hotness that flooded my cheeks as I spoke, and hurried on, hushing my voice for fear of those black windows that seemed to stare and listen. "You must think this very odd of me and unconventional. But the truth is——" I gave a silly little laugh, "I've come here to-night without my father's knowledge, and I must get back, too, without his knowledge, and please—truly, I must go."

He stood in silence, his hands in the pockets of his trousers, and on his lips a smile that made his face look young: much younger.

"I don't somehow see you in this house. I can imagine the sort of house. My father has one similar in Dublin. I escaped it too."

"Oh, do you come from Dublin?" I asked stupidly.

"No, my father has a house there. I come from County Mayo. Where do you come from?"

"I have told you—here."

He shook his head. "Not here. I have had glimpses of you otherwheres than this—at other times. But always shadowy glimpses. I have never really seen you until now."

A queer sensation seized me: it was as if I had heard him saying this before, as if I had stood just here and in this moment through some dim, remoter past, or through eternity hearing his voice, seeing his face in that clear pallid light; and I knew the words that followed before he spoke them. "I have always known that I should meet you. I've been waiting . . ."

I thought: This isn't true. This isn't happening. I'm tipsy. I've had too much champagne. He belongs to Mimi. He loves Mimi. . . . And my heart was beating madly in my chest that he must hear it.

"I saw you," he went on, "in the theatre. You must

have strayed there from—wherever. Did you lose your way?"

And then . . . How queer it is that until this moment I have never yet recalled the words he spoke, standing out there in the moonlight at that first meeting. Yet, locked in some dark cupboard of my mind, I have them stored. . . . He told me he had lived in Paris (so that, I supposed, was where he and Mimi had first met) and that he had come now to find a home in London—a shorter journey back and forth to Ireland. He missed the hunting in Ireland living in Paris, although there were, he said, a million compensations. And I thought, yes, Mimi for one.

I was surprised to hear him speak so enthusiastically of hunting. He did not seem at all the type who cared for sport. And I think he was almost shocked to hear that I had never ridden horseback in my life.

"That," he said, "is obvious, or you would not speak of riding 'horseback.' What do you expect to ride—a broomstick? Which, after all, I think, would be more suitable. There *are* young witches, too. Some day perhaps I'll make a play along those lines——" And now he was talking more to himself than to me—"in a mediæval setting. Or has it already been done? It must surely have been done. There are enormous possibilities in witchcraft."

"Do you write?" I asked him, very impressed.

He shrugged. "*Comme ça, comme ça*. I am publishing my first novel in the autumn."

"Fancy!" was all I found to say. And more than ever did I feel my insignificance. Then somewhere a clock chimed three: all the stars had faded and the moon's face had a greenish pallor. "Can you wonder," he said, staring up, "that it looks bilious? It has battered its fill on the world to-night. Do you know——" he turned to me, "it is all wrong this idea of the moon being old and dead, and a woman? It's not old, it's not dead, and it's not a woman. Nor yet is it a man. It's a young hermaphrodite, infant spawn of Lucifer. It feeds from the earth's breast, it drains the life blood from its mother, God help her! It is responsible for all the madness and the badness in the world. Even its name spells lunacy. But isn't it obvious? How can scientists refute it with their dusty talk and arguments, when you've only to take note of moon's effect on all things here below? The spoiled brat it is—hungry, ravenous, and ruthless. It will take a hundred billion years to grow into a sun—burnt out of all its malice, and by that time it will have had its fill of you and me—and of this universe."

I thought this over: No, I could not cope with such a staggering conception which I suspected he had thrown out to see how much nonsense I would take; and as if he read my thoughts: "You're sceptical," he said, "I'm disappointed. *You* should know the truth of it. Haven't you been taught the secret things that belong unto the lords your gods? Or are you still a probationer?"

He can't, I told myself, be tipsy, for as far as I can tell he has taken nothing to drink to-night. But if not tipsy, he must surely be a trifle—odd.

He took a silver cigarette case from his pocket, looked at it and sighed, then looked at me.

"If you want to smoke," I told him quickly, "pray do. I don't at all object."

He offered me his case. "Perhaps you'll join me?"

That brought me to my senses. Decidedly, I thought, he must be *toqué*. I was in a hurry now to go, there was too much moon madness all about us. "And you, too, must go," I said, "Mimi will be wondering——"

I paused: Yes, what would she be wondering?

He waited to light his cigarette before he answered; the flare of the fusee lit his face, which I thought had clouded. "Mimi will not notice whether I am there or not. Her followers are legion."

I nodded to myself.

"And now," he said, "you are looking more than ever elfish. What have you seen? And what do you know, or what do you *think* you know?"

"Much more than you imagine," I replied, with another nod. He threw away the lighted fusee. It fell with a little hiss into a tangle of nettles. "You, too," he said, "will vanish like that with the dawn."

"If you think," I retorted, "I am going to stay here till dawn, you are very much mistaken. I must go—this minute."

"Then at least you will allow me to speed you on your way." And before I could draw breath, he had picked me up in his arms and perched me on the top of the wall as though I were a doll: and there I sat, bereft of speech and in a mighty flutter. "Now," he said, "I can look up at you. I get a different angle of your face this way. You have eyes like flowers, and eyelashes like spiders' legs—they touch your eyebrows. And your hair is full of stardust. . . ."

All this was very foolish, I daresay; but youth is always foolish,

and how long I would have sat there looking down at him while he looked up at me I cannot tell, but that we both heard Mimi calling, "Jonathan!"

And sense returned; and hampered though I was with skirts and frills and flounces, I managed to effect a scramble which landed me with a hideous screech of rent silk on the right side of the garden wall.

Nor did I look back, nor answer when he whispered, "I do not even know your name——" but ran soft as a cat to the window that I had left unlatched. I could see the glowing tip of his cigarette through a chink of the shutters as I closed them, and had a glimpse of him as he stood with his arms on the wall, seeming less like a man than the ghost of one there in the moonlight.

V

My crazy escapade that night was not discovered. I was back in bed before Papa came home. I heard him ascend the stairs and go into his dressing-room. I thought I heard a groan. I got out of bed and went to my door, opened it, listening. What I heard then made me shut the door quickly, and stop my ears.

The revolting sounds ceased. I opened my door again just wide enough to watch unseen. The dawn was breaking and in the grey dusk of it I saw him come out of his room carrying a chamber-pot. He lurched down the stairs to the lavatory on the half-landing, clinging with one hand to the banisters. Again I closed the door and scurried back to bed where I lay, quaking. It did not occur to me that he was drunk. I believed him in worse case; poisoned perhaps from something he had eaten, but I could not bring myself to go to him. If he were in need of attention he could ring the bell for Hood. There were bells in all the rooms that rang upstairs to rouse the maids. The recollection of that nightmare glimpse earlier in the evening stayed with me still. I was afraid, and more than afraid; yet while imagination reeled before the vile fantasies that it created, one part of me must pry and peer in gloating curiosity on evil things unguessed and now uncovered, shared with him.

I slept at last, exhausted, and was awakened at the usual time by Dowson.

"Madam says you are to get up for breakfast, miss."

"I am not well enough," I muttered; and indeed I felt, and must have looked, like death.

"Madam's orders, miss," Dowson announced with venom. "She says you've lazed in bed long enough. She is very annoyed with you for trying to scare me with your talk of smallpox. It'd be a judgment on you if you went and caught it—making a fool of me with Hood and Cook."

"Dowson, you mistake," I told her gently, "no one could make a fool of you."

She gave me a look beneath her white-lashed eyelids that made me wonder how much she knew or guessed. I told her to leave me; I would ring when I wanted her. I must see how much damage had been done to my dress before she went through my wardrobe.

I found a great rent in the hem of my skirt, dirt on my petticoats, a frill of lace in rags. I had flung off my clothes in a hurry, tearing at the hooks as I struggled to unfasten my bodice, and had stowed them away in the cupboard where now in damning evidence they hung. Dowson would find them in this state and questions would be asked, for the dress I had worn the night before was brand new from Madame Clarice.

Hurriedly I made a bundle of the things, hid them in a drawer, locked it and took the key. I could dispose of them later; mend them myself if need be.

I found Selina in a pink *négligé* reading her letters at the breakfast table, and the staff lined up waiting for Papa. I wondered if he were too ill to appear, but he arrived barely five minutes late with excuses.

"You must speak to the housemaid, my love. She did not bring me my tea until twenty to eight."

I saw Alice turn scarlet, and I knew that he lied.

He took his place at the head of the table and opened the Bible. He read from the book. He knelt, and he prayed to his God.

The servants filed out. He sat. Selina served him. He hoped that she had passed a pleasant evening? Yes, indeed, a very pleasant evening. Her singing—she glanced at me—had been a *great* success. She had come home about eleven and had not heard him return.

No? He opened his paper, scanned the headlines, and said: "I was detained after the dinner with a fellow mason who is also a client. He insisted I should go back to his rooms to discuss his case."

None but I, knowing what I knew, would have noticed his cheeks were blotchy under the red, and that the blue-whites of his eyes were tinged with yellow. He turned to me. "You are better now, I take it?"

"Yes, Papa, thank you."

"You look washed out. No temperature?"

"No, Papa."

"Nicholas." Selina laid aside the letter she was reading. "I

wish to speak to you. I have made a discovery. I don't wish to cause trouble but——”

I thought I saw him start; a frown appeared between his eyebrows. “Yes?” He looked at the clock. “I have not much time.”

“What I have to say will not detain you. It's about Jenny.”

I quailed; and could swear his face had cleared.

“More misdemeanours?” But his smile had no terror for me now.

“Jenny was not ill yesterday,” Selina dispassionately stated, “but for some reason or other best known to herself, she chose to spend the day in bed.”

“There is surely no great harm in that? A little is cured with a little. These summer colds can be most troublesome.”

Partisanship such as this was most unusual. What could it portend? Unless—as with perception tuned by shock I saw it—unless Selina, poor soul, must now be scapegoat, since she stood between his conscience and his guilt.

“No harm at all,” agreed Selina blandly, “but it has come to my ears that she played some ridiculous practical joke on Dowson to frighten her out of her life by pretending she had caught, of all things, smallpox.”

I released a breath.

With his napkin, Papa patted the smile from his lips. “Really, my love, you must not pay attention to every childish prank that——”

“It is no childish prank.” Selina interrupted. “It is all part of a systematic method by which Jenny has managed to make poor Dowson's life a misery ever since she has been in service here. It is time you were told of the disgraceful way Jenny behaves to the servants, and in particular to her maid, with the consequence that Dowson has given me her notice. The poor creature came to me in tears. She has complained to me before of Jenny's rudeness, but now she won't stand it any longer. Jenny, it seems, has taken a dislike to Dowson and shows a marked preference for the housemaid Alice——”

“Who called me late this morning,” Papa gave another glance at the clock. “And don't, pray, bother me, my dear, with your domestic problems. You must cope with them yourself. If what Dowson has told you is true, and knowing my own daughter I do not for one moment doubt it, Jenny must in future do without a maid, or else share yours.”

"That," Selina replied, pink with anger, "is impossible. Blanche has quite enough to do——"

"And so have I." Papa gulped the last of his coffee. "I have to be in the Courts by ten o'clock. I must be off."

"But you have eaten no breakfast."

"I have no time for breakfast." And no appetite, I thought. He had left his eggs and bacon untouched.

"Then do I understand," Selina was not to be put down; her knife was in me and she drove it to the hilt, "that Jenny is *not* to have a personal maid in future? Is she to be permitted to go out alone? I thought it was your wish that she should never be allowed out alone."

"Am I," Papa explosively demanded, rising from the table, "to be pestered with these ridiculous discussions at his hour of the morning? Pray, my dear, do have some sense of proportion. Do what you like, but don't come to me about matters entirely outside my province. I am really very late." And he hurried from the room.

Selina looked at me.

"You have heard what your father says?"

I had indeed, with much rejoicing. I was to be released from my wardress at last. I would be allowed out alone. I could walk where I pleased, unattended by a slimy Dowson. I thanked God from the bottom of my heart that sin, not virtue, had brought its own reward. The way of transgressors was surely not so hard.

I said impulsively: "Selina, I am most truly sorry. I know I've been a beast sometimes to Dowson." Her eyes weighed heavily upon me, guarded, chill; their gilded shallows held no warmth, no friendliness. I had forfeited all right to her affection. She saw me, as to her, I was warped, spiteful, spoiled: self-engrossed and self-sufficient, callous with the hard insensibility of youth that has not learned to suffer more than that which may impede its headlong flight. And how fleeting is its journey, how swift the pace, how short the pause at the first obstacle, the first rebuff, the first flesh wound, before the spirit challenges the sword-point of experience.

And in that moment with Selina's eyes upon me, I recoiled, while a deep wave of contrition overswept me. If only now I could wipe out that ugly score against myself—and her: those small subtle pains I had so wilfully inflicted and that stood between us magnified in her resentment and my shame. If I could bring myself to tell her now that I would try henceforth to make

amends, hold out my hand to hers. and start afresh. . . . I tried, clumsily, with halting speech.

"Selina, I know that I've been hateful not to Dowson only, but to you."

Her eyes were empty and I stopped: It was too late.

She said, her tone reflective while she watched me: "Yes, I fully sympathize with Dowson. She must have had extraordinary patience. So, I think, have I. You have a rare capacity——" she gave a little laugh—"for making life uncomfortable for those you hate."

"I don't," I muttered, "hate——"

"Oh, yes, you do." How deftly she put in her word to shatter mine. "You either hate or love. You do not understand half measures. Perhaps that's in your favour. At least you don't pretend."

"Selina," I cried, trembling, "you have this wrong. I don't hate anybody. It's simply that—I can't explain it quite. But perhaps if one has been—say—often hurt, it's only human nature to hurt back."

Her face, delicately pink and white, was like a mask, swept clear of all expression. Who could tell what she was thinking? Impersonal, impassive, she sat there withdrawn from me, watching, cat-like, my timid scrabbling approach.

"Who," she asked, "has hurt you? Certainly not I."

"No," I said, "not you. But perhaps you stood for something—someone else. I don't know. I can't explain——" Inarticulate, I writhed, while a curious pricking sensation seemed to spread over my scalp. What had I said—what unnatural situation had I evoked at our breakfast table?

"Why," she asked, "do you try to make yourself a martyr? You have everything in the world you want. I have never interfered."

"I know," I agreed humbly.

"Not," she said, and it seemed that she had caught my father's smile, "not that I intend to interfere. Your sisters luckily for me, are going to bring you out, which under different circumstances I might have been glad to do. As it is——" she rose, gathering her letters; her big bosom, under the lace ruffles of her gown, stirred as she took a breath deep from the diaphragm—"as it is, I am thankful to be relieved of the responsibility. It is really most provoking about Dowson. I shall certainly not engage another maid for you. Alice can help you dress if you want her, but I

can't have her answering the bell all day, so don't ring it more than you can help. You will have to go out alone. I don't suppose you can be trusted out alone——" her eyes glanced swiftly at me, then away—"but that has nothing to do with me. I see," she proceeded with disquieting inconsequence, "that Mrs O'Connor's daughter made her *début* at the Opéra Comique last night. The *Morning Post* does not give her a particularly good criticism."

She left me wondering. Had that allusion to Mimi been deliberate or not? But anything she may have known, or that Dowson may have told her, remained sealed within herself. She would never stoop to trivial revenge. Her largeness was not merely physical. She had the contour and something of the grandeur of an Elgin marble. I was small; I think I never have felt smaller.

Later in the morning I took myself across the wall to Mike. I was not due for a lesson, but I heard him at the piano and guessed that I would find him there alone.

I did.

He was suffering, he said, from a shrew of a wife who had been at him ever since he woke with seven devils in his head, and if I'd come for a lesson I could take myself home. He had nothing to give me to-day. "And would ye have known I was drunk last night? That woman she says I disgraced myself before the company for the way I was singing bawdy songs to 'em. I swear by Jesus I did not at all, or if I did, I don't remember. Did ye hear me say one word that could not be spoken to me grandmother?"

I reminded him that I had left before the party was over. He paid no heed to that.

"Now wait—I'll show you what the papers say of Mimi."

He gave me a pile of cuttings and made me read them all. Some praised, and some did not. He had underlined the best of them in red ink. And: "What can you expect," he wished to know, "of a race of shopkeepers, who have created to their monumental shame the Albert Memorial, guardian of their peace and plenty, symbol of their art?"

I retorted, hot: "You can't blame us for the Albert Memorial. You must blame the Queen."

"I don't, then. I blame you and all white snakes of Albion—all cant, all dissembling, all solid worth and municipal complacency and the whole capitalist system."

"Mike! I won't have it. Do you hear? I hate you when you start running down the English. What right have you to speak against us? We have more to do in England than waste ourselves

on art. Leave that for the Italians, or the French—or—the Irish. Yes, we are a race of shopkeepers, and we're proud of it. It's this race of shopkeepers, remember, who beat Napoleon when he had conquered all of Europe, but he couldn't conquer us. And I'll remind you that the white snake of Albion is coiled round the world. Don't forget the snake is the emblem of eternity."

Mike sat and laughed at me. "I'll say you're a staunch little Briton."

"Well, and aren't you British, too?"

"I belong," said Mike, "to the land of my fathers."

"Then why," I flashed, "don't you go back there?"

This was not the first argument of its kind in which Mike and I had indulged. But I had no desire at this moment to prolong it. I steered the talk to smoother channels with a carelessness that may have been a trifle overdone.

"This Jonathan Rourke, whom I met last night—is he Irish too?"

"Indeed he is. A kinsman of me own. His mother was an O'Connor, my cousin once removed. She married Curraghmore, and Jonathan is a younger son. Did ye see a faded woman in blue velvet, with hair like hay?"

I nodded.

"She's his Ant, wife of Mullingar of West Meath. There's talk now of a separation. She's been causing a proper scandal on account of her association with Parnell and the Cause—and her husband, a lord of the county. She's as mad as a hatter, but aren't we all?"

"So—Jonathan then, he's a relative, too? A kind of cousin?"

One had to go on asking, for if he were a cousin, a near cousin . . .

"Some distance off—on the distaff side."

Hope waned. *Not* a near cousin, but I must hear more—learn all, then hide away the thought of him for ever.

"And has Mimi known him all her life?"

"No, not until she met him lately, I think, in Paris."

"And I suppose Jonathan——" It was easy to repeat his name once one had said it—"Is he—is Jonathan——" I lowered my voice conspiratorially, like any old dowager discussing her daughter's chances at a ball; indeed I felt that I had aged considerably. "Is he fond of her, do you think?"

"Fond is it?" echoed Mike, inflated. "Who could be *fond* of her? It's neck or nothing with them. They're on their knees.

He's only one of a dozen strings to her bow, but I'd say he has a better chance than any foreigner. He's of her blood, although I don't deny I'd think twice before I'd give her to *him*—not that I'll be asked. She'll do as she pleases when it comes to her choice. She might pick better than the son of that yellow-livered Curraghmore. The land's mortgaged to the hilt, and the poor starvin' devils on it'll have his blood before they've done with him. That's all they will have, for Curraghmore has nothing and his son's got less, but he'll make his way. He, too, had the touch upon him at his birth. He published a book of verse when he was still at Balliol that makes mud of Oscar's purple patches. Come along now, will you, and play me what ye've memorized of that first movement. . . ."

No more was said of Jonathan, but I had heard enough.

Next day I had a letter, and although I had never seen the writing, I knew before I opened it from whom it came. It arrived by the second post, bore an address in Bloomsbury and had no beginning and no end.

"I must meet you again, Jennifer Drew. You see I have found your name. If it is possible for you to leave your prison will you walk and talk with me in Kensington Gardens by the Round Pond any afternoon this week? I shall be there at four each day and if you are not——" He signed it J. Rourke.

I kept that note. I have it still: but I didn't answer it, nor did I go. What could he want with me who could have all of her and she my friend?

I remember how I used to seek her out. She lay in bed all hours in the morning, reading her letters and her press-cuttings, surrounded by flowers, perfumes, great boxes of chocolates, baskets of fruit. Her room had been redecorated to her taste; all white it was like the inside of a cup, white walls, white bed, piled high with cushions, curtained and frilled in white. Her bed-cover was threaded with black velvet *bébé* ribbon, her hair black against the white pillows; the carpet black, sprinkled with white roses.

She talked to me of her life in Paris, of the long hard years of study, of her first appearance as *première danseuse*, of her successes. Her mercurial dexterity of speech recreated for me each scene, each episode. I relived with her each triumph, suffered with her the anguish of her 'nerves' before each entrance. "And *how* I suffer—you would not believe! It is like some terrible monster waiting there—the audience—waiting to devour. I see it in my mind as one great cavernous mouth. But

when I am on I forget everything. I see nothing. I am out of myself."

"I suppose," I dared to ask her, "that you have had a great many proposals?"

I saw them on their knees as Mike had said, a procession of infatuated suitors: crowned heads, coronets. A carriage would drive up to the house of the Baroness von Solberg; out of it would come a top-hatted gentleman in a fur-collared coat. He would have a flowing black moustache, flashing black eyes. He would carry a bouquet of flowers. She would receive him in a white gown foaming with lace. He would kiss her hand. "Mademoiselle Maritzka, *je t'adore!*" He was of the highest nobility, a Duke at least. "I can no longer contain my love for you. Will you honour me? Will you be my bride? I will be forced to kill myself if you refuse me." He was too old. Thirty-five at least. She did refuse him and he may have killed himself. Or there would be one younger, fair and slight; not Jonathan. He among them all had been successful—but another. An American. Mitzi had said there had been an American—very bold, very ardent, with a fascinating drawl, who offered himself and his millions to be again gently, a little sadly, perhaps, refused.

"Proposals?" Mimi's laughter scattered illusion founded on avid perusal of Ouida. "Proposals of what? Proposals, yes—but not the kind you think. I have been offered a chateau and a villa at Monte Carlo. I have been given jewels, and men have sworn that they would die for me—but *not* for love."

I detected here a bitter scorn beyond my range.

"But, Mimi, surely there must be many men who want to marry you?"

"A few silly fools. None whom I can yet afford to marry."

"Afford——?"

She took a bon-bon from a box tied with mauve ribbon, bit into it with her little front teeth, threw it aside.

"They are all soft, these—I like the hard ones. Take them. Take them all." She handed me the box. I protested. "Yes, please have them. I'll be sick."

"But is there no one——" I persisted—"no one in *particular* that you would like to marry?"

For I must know.

"Oh, yes," she smiled to herself, "one maybe—or two or even three. I think now——" her eyes gleamed, "I think now I am in love. It is necessary for my art that I must love. If I have no

lover in my life I am like cold meat without the mustard!" She laughed again; I saw the tip of her rosy tongue between her teeth, "Yes, I will tell you, Jenny—there is one above all others. Perhaps one day when I am rich, and he is rich—we will be married. But he will have to be very, *very* rich for me to give up my art to be a wife—to sit in his house——" she made a face—"and be the mother of a family. Marriage is a luxury only for the rich, but not for him and me. We are not ready yet. He, too, is artist."

I was shocked.

"Mimi, would you really let money, or the want of it, stand in the way of your happiness?"

"My dear, money—or the want of it—always stands in the way of happiness."

"It hasn't stood in the way of Mike's and Mitzi's happiness. They've always been poor."

"Yes. But I am not as Mike and Mitzi. I have not yet loved as those two love. They were babies when they married, they have been babies ever since. They are younger than I—both of them. Much, much younger. They are my little sister, my little brother. She knows nothing of life, and he is the sweetest darling, but a child still. I am not a child. I think I never was a child."

"Yes, you were," I said warmly, "you were the funniest, most adorable child. Without you, I don't know how I could have endured *my* childhood."

"Poor Jenny!" She looked at me, considering my case, her eyes were misty, softer than her words that tripped metallic on a harsh bright note. "It is awful that you should be so wasted in that *milieu*. For you there is nothing in your life but marriage. You must make what is called a Grand Match, and have children and a home and be a matron in a cap. I can see you—very gracious, very *comme il faut*. You will play the piano to your guests and they will say 'How wonderful! You are as good as any professional. How proud you must be of your gifted wife, Mr —whoever it is,' and he will beam and blow out his paunch, and be very proud indeed. And perhaps you will have a child who inherits your talent, and if it is a girl you will tell her, 'No, my love, I can never allow you to be a concert player. That has never been known in our family —,' and if it is a boy, he will say, 'Be damned to you, Mamma, and to the family. I am not tied to your apron. I am a vagabond, a troubadour, I will play my music in the streets and up and down the world.' And maybe you will see fruit come again in your dead orchard. Or maybe not. You will forget,

as you grow older, as you grow fat—no, you will never be fat, my sweet Jenny, you will be thin like a little old hen—thin and sharp and pale, with a precise grey fringe plastered on your forehead. And I think you will forget that once you held in your fingers the key to all things that are lovely.”

Was she cruel? Was this unkindness deliberate? I could not think so for her eyes were sad. She said: “And yet perhaps if I were free to marry I would choose—just that.”

“But you are free.” I told her, “you will marry. If you love——”

“Love! Love!” She flung wide her hands in a theatrical gesture. “What is it, this love? I take my love as men take their drink. I am sick of love.” Her lips pouted, trembling. “Jenny, I wish I were you—so young, and fresh. I wish I were not so old—and stale. I wish—I wish——” a spasm crossed her face. I saw a muscle in her throat contract. She turned her head restlessly from me; and I thought, with somewhere deep a desperate hope: They must have quarrelled. They will make it up. This is what they call a lovers’ tiff. I suffered with her. I felt the anguish of her hidden tears, spoke to her in my heart: He will come back. Have patience. This moment’s pain will pass when you are in his arms. . . . A fierce tremor shook my body; sense dissolved in a quivering darkness. I heard his voice call my name, felt his touch upon me, and died a little death—was resurrected.

“Mimi, I must go.” Dry-lipped, I stood fumbling with my gloves, moving to the door, my mouth fixed in a smile that felt like the grin of a skull.

She sat up, her hand to her head. “Yes, indeed you must. My God! And so must I! I have a luncheon appointment at one o’clock. I must dress. Do please take these chocolates. I don’t want them.” She pressed the box upon me; her laughter gleamed again. “Will you have to sneak back over the wall?”

My face flamed. “No, they think I have come for my lesson, but I shall have to say Mitzi gave me these.”

“Is it possible? Would they murder you if they knew that you came to see me? I wonder they allow you to come here even for your lessons. Do they know I am living here?”

“Selina asked me once, and I said you were staying at an hotel. I had to. They might have stopped my lessons.” I giggled feebly, drowned in humiliation. “It is absurd, isn’t it?”

“No, not at all. It is quite correct. How can the daughter of a worthy solicitor associate with a common little ballerina?”

Well, you are brave to come. You are not afraid of being corrupted?"

Her dancing eyes held nothing now but mockery. How swiftly she rang the changes on her moods.

I blinked, giggling again, hating myself till almost in my shame I hated her.

"Good-bye," I muttered, and turning at the door, came back, clutching in my arms her box of chocolates with its coquettish bow of ribbons, loving her more than ever for that second's doubt. "I want you to be happy," I whispered, "I *know* you will be happy. Don't let any misunderstanding come between you and—him."

I nodded reassuringly, stooped and kissed her; left her wondering.

* * *

After Mimi's début came my own. The crowded days flew by while life narrowed to a breathless rush of shopping expeditions with Belle or Laura, and then the all-important choice to be decided in the green-carpeted temple of Madame Clarice, arch-priestess of the sacrificial rite. To her were brought the vestals for their robing.

Madame, large, formidable in black, welcomes us with smiles, wherein none but the most astute observer would have detected a degree less warmth than that accorded in grovelling farewell to the Duchess of A—and her two lumpy daughters, our predecessors by appointment. They pass out as we pass in. The Duchess, stout, florid, upholstered in maroon, is wearing a bonnet, the facsimile of old Nurse's Sunday best even to the violets and bugles. The Ladies Maud and Dorothy B——, with pimpled suet faces, sandy-haired, loose-lipped and fishy-eyed, might easily be Dowson's sisters.

"*Merci*, your grace, *merci!*" Madame may or may not have been born French, but she affects a stong French accent. "Tuesday, *à onze heures*, *alors*, your grace. By then the *faillie* will have arrived from Paris. *Bon jour*, your grace, *au'voir*, miladies." Her bow is almost, but not quite, a curtsy.

"Ovwar, madame," returns the beaming Duchess.

"Ovwar," miladies pipe in chorus.

We stand aside at the head of the staircase. The Duchess still largely smiling murmurs, "Thank you," to the air. Miladies

echo, "Thank you," and give me timid looks. We are united in our fear of the unknown. I am torn with pity for these sisters. They are impossibly, hopelessly plain. But the daughters of a Duke can always marry. Suppose they don't? At least they will have each other. They will do good works and district visiting. Goodness exudes from every pore of their unfortunate complexions. No, they are not like Dowson; they are kind.

They descend the stairs. We advance into the inner sanctuary. Serpentine assistants hover discreetly, awaiting the word of command.

"Ah, Lady Woodstock, *bon jour—comme je suis enchantée.*" Even though she is Belle's junior by two years and can afford but one gown to Belle's dozen, the right of seniority is Laura's now. "Madame Haddon—and Mees Drew, *bon jour!* Pray be seated, milady. Madame—Mademoiselle."

We sit.

Madame, a finger to her lips, is lost in thought. Her shrewd boot-button eyes judiciously regard me. As if speaking to herself, she says, "We will want something *très originale* for Mademoiselle—something arresting, yet very sweet—very young. Miss Abbott! Show *le Jour de Printemps s'il vous plaît.*"

The parade begins. Clarice was one of the first London dress-makers to display her gowns upon the living model. A disdainful goddess robed in white glides from behind a curtain. She is tall and fair, haughty and beautiful beyond imagination. Her arms and bosom are like alabaster, she has unbelievable curves; and I am dust beneath her slippers.

"Is this not *exquise* for Mademoiselle? *Jour de Printemps—vraiment* Day of Spring. So chaste—*charmante*. Snowdrops—*regardez-vous*, mesdames, these clusters of snowdrops on the shoulder, repeated on the train. Mademoiselle herself is like a snowdrop. *Une petite fleur*. And see here the graceful drapery of the corsage? So clever, *voyez-vous?*—to accentuate the bust?" Yes, it will need accentuating.

But the decision cannot be lightly made. An hour's conference is expected on the choice of material, silk, poplin, faille or surah, brocade or satin for the train, and two, three more models shown. 'La Rose Blanche,' 'Hyacinthe,' 'Le Cygne.' But I am still a duckling.

My sisters favour the Spring Day. I am not consulted. I have no voice in this. How I envy the white goddess. For all the arduous instruction with one Miss de Lacy, which now and for the next

few weeks I am forced to undergo, I can never achieve that poise, that regal carriage. can never acquire that faultless sweeping curtsey. Disaster is almost sure to overtake me. I shall be disgraced before my Queen, before the Court. If only I could die before the day! That train! . . . O, dear God, help! I shall trip over my train. I am a centipede. I have a hundred feet. Perhaps Mimi will teach me how to do it. Never, never can I learn from Miss de Lacy. . . .

"Then that is settled, Madame Clarice, *le Jour de Printemps*."

"*Merci*, milady—*merci*, madame. You have chosen the most beautiful of all my gowns. Rest assured that Mademoiselle will be *exquise* in this *ensemble*. If Mademoiselle will come for her first fitting on Monday next?" A card is handed to me; I am led away.

In the carriage Belle and Laura discuss my bouquet. Snow-drops?

"Not in June, my dear. White camellias. I think, or lilies of the valley. We must ask Madame. Do you like the gown, Jenny?"

"Yes, but must I have such yards and yards of train? I shall never be able to manage it."

"Nonsense! Of course you will. A few more lessons with Miss de Lacy——"

How Mimi laughed when I described to her the agonies endured with Miss de Lacy. The long room. . . .

"Like ice—so slippery. And a person in red velvet thumping a march on the piano. And Miss de Lacy with rows and rows of teeth—in black. Why do they all wear black?"

"Because," Mimi said sepulchrally, "they are burying your soul."

"Don't! How horrid. But truly, Mimi, it is awful. Thank goodness I have private lessons. I would never have the courage to attend a class. I should expire having to perform in front of other girls all giggling. If you could see me! I have a calico train fastened to my shoulders—three mangy feathers in my hair—and I hold a bouquet of paper flowers. I had to be taught how to walk, with a book balanced on my head. I am past that now, but the curtsey! In front of a mirror with Miss de Thing saying 'Glide the right foot—sink—evaporate.'"

"No, not *evaporate*!" screamed Mimi, shaking with laughter on her pillows. She was always in bed when I went to see her. I don't think she ever got up till midday.

"Yes, truly. If you could only hear the words she uses! I am

sure she doesn't know what half of them mean, nor does anybody else. 'Evaporate. Evolve—recline—and make your obey-essence.' Why—why do I have to do this? Just as if the Queen cares a row of pins whether I am presented to her or not."

"But the world will care, my dear. It is your *cachet*, your hail-mark, the insignia of your class. Your *entrée* to society. I prophesy for you a *succès fou*. You will marry a guardsman, *sans doute*. Your fate is written on you."

Although her words were lightly spoken I felt my cheeks turn hot. A guardsman! . . . Hugh's face rose before me, blotting-paper pink, blond-haired. I would be a matron in a cap.

"Mimi," I besought her, avoiding her mocking eyes, "show me how to make a curtsy. If you show me I could do it."

"I? My God, I couldn't make a Court curtsy to save my life."

"But to save mine you could."

"It is your own life. You have chosen."

"I have not," I parried hotly, "such life as I must live has been thrust upon me."

"You could thrust it back if you had strength enough."

And I knew that she despised me for what I was, for what I would become.

She never spoke of Jonathan, but one day I saw an empty envelope on her bed and recognized the writing. I guessed she had the letter hidden somewhere: under the pillow, probably. And another time Mitzi came to tell her, "Jonathan called just now to see you, but I said you were asleep."

"Oh, why? How silly of you, darling! I could have seen him here."

"You think? So! I do not. You will regard the *conveniences* when you are in my house," declared Mitzi while her daughter laughed at her. "Do you think I allow you to receive men in your bedroom *comme cocotte*?"

"You see what a dragon my little mother has become? She will be as strict soon as your Papa. She has lived too long in England—the poor sweet. I must take you back to Paris with me, darling."

She told me nothing, and I asked no questions. It was never my affair, but I thought that whether Mitzi approved or not, Jonathan would visit her in her bedroom if she wished him to do so. And after all, was that so very shocking? The beauties of eighteenth-century France received their lovers in their bedroom;

there would be quite an audience to watch the lady's toilette—the Abbé, the *perruquier*, the favoured suitor, although one could perhaps understand Mitzi's reaction to the idea of Mimi entertaining her fiancé in this fashion. He could always visit her 'at the theatre—as I had no doubt he did—and drive home with her after the performance. . . . Whatever misunderstanding had come between them was obviously now cleared up, but I wished she were a little less secretive. I wondered if he had learned my name from her—had asked her at the party that night when he returned from our talk in the garden: 'Darling,' for they always called each other 'darling' in my thoughts, 'who was that odd little thing that climbed over the wall?' Or he might have said, 'who was that quaint—or even charming—little thing who climbed over the wall?' or again it might have been: 'She was rather unusual, that *plain* little thing you inflicted on me last night. It would be amusing to know if she would dare to meet me in Kensington Gardens. She seems to dare a great deal—climbing over the wall in that hoydenish fashion. Would you mind if I wrote her a note?'

'Mind! Of course not, darling, don't we belong to each other?' . . . Yes, Mimi knew her own security, why should she mind? She feared no rival, or never one so insignificant as I. How wonderful to be so self-assured, so famous, unique, desirable . . . and so desired.

* * *

The preparations were completed; the hurrying weeks delivered up at last the Day. Alice called me at half-past six with my breakfast, which on this occasion it was permitted I could take in bed. Impossible to eat. I drank a cup of coffee, nibbled toast that tasted like sawdust, and then came the long process of my adorning. . . .

I stand, the finished article before my mirror, unrecognizable and to myself unknown. Nothing of me is in this strange reflection. The last time I had worn a veil on my head was at my confirmation. Then I had looked like a bride, and now I look—ridiculous. Blanche, lent to me by Selina, since Dowson, to my joy, is gone for good, has dressed my hair in a new and painful way: dragged up in Neronian curls—to which a few false ones have been added over a pad, to hold the towering plumes. From a cluster of snowdrops encircling my chignon, fall layers of tulle veiling. My

train, engarlanded with airy ruchings, trails yards of weighted satin. Of what use is Miss de Lacy's careful instruction now? Weeks of practice in the flimsy mockery of calico have not prepared me for the agony of this billowing encumbrance and the aching tightness of my stays, pulled in to breaking-point by Blanche. Madame Clarice's judicious padding has given me unnatural curves. I now possess a bosom, hips, a waist so small a man's hand could have spanned it, but to gain these ends each breath I take is torture.

Papa and Selina come to my room to see me in my glory.

Selina's verdict is devoid of gush.

"Very nice. You look years older. It's going to be a hot day. I should think that you'd be suffocated in those yards of veiling. Surely Madame Clarice has overdone it for a *débutante*. I should say your train was dowager's length. You have not the height to carry it."

"Absurd," Papa agrees. "much—much too long." A pretty penny it would cost he has *no* doubt. He has not seen the bill, he has not been consulted as to price. Oh, no, *he* merely pays the piper, and he hopes to God I will not disgrace myself before Her Majesty. I know, of course, not to turn my back?

Yes, I know that.

At nine o'clock Belle's brougham calls to take me to Park Street, where my sister, immense in sapphire-blue brocade with a silver train, awaits me. She appears in the doorway, shadowed by her maid, escorted by the butler. There is scarcely room in the brougham for both of us. Passers-by stop and stare; an errand boy jeers. "I do detest," whispers Belle, "these morning Drawing-rooms. I am sure she will outlive us all, but if *ever* the Prince comes to the throne, I hope the first thing he does is to hold the Drawing-rooms in the evenings. One *looks* one's worst and one *feels* one's worst at this unconscionable hour. Did Blanche do your hair?" She surveys me, nodding approval. "Yes, she is certainly much better at hair than Dowson. What a good thing she left Horrid creature. Clarice really is a genius. How clever of her to emphasize that old-world touch. You are not a beauty, my dear, you are not even actually pretty, but you have quite a style of your own. I am glad Blanche has taken up your fringe. I always think a fringe detracts from eyes. Such a pity you have that ugly scar. You will always have to hide it. Pinch your cheeks, dear, you are a little too pale."

I pinch my cheeks and mutter that my stays are killing me.

"Then you must hold yourself in. Gracious! Is that the time?" We are passing down St James's Street; the carriage slackens to a funeral pace. "We ought to have started earlier. There is bound to be a crush the first Drawing-room after the Jubilee. I had no idea it would take all these hours to get there. I hope you won't forget everything you've been taught. She is simply terrifying. She never smiles. If we are late we shall miss her. She is unlikely to sit it through. When she gets tired she goes and the Prince and Princess take over. It would be too bad to miss her. Oh, this heat! It *would* be ninety in the shade to-day. Did you have any breakfast? You'll get nothing to eat there, you know. She won't allow refreshments in any shape or form."

The thought that no refreshment would be offered—in any shape or form—reminds me that I am ravenous. Our snail's progress seems never ending. The way is lined with spectators who have come to view the procession, mostly women from the suburbs out for a morning's shopping. Some of them, no doubt, are filled with envy. Those two young girls with their fat Mamma would, I am sure, suffer willingly the torment of my head-dress and whalebone armour, if they could change places with me and face the worse ordeal to come. And though the day is insufferably warm, I freeze. Suppose I make a false step, slide the wrong foot, stumble as I curtsy! I see myself spread out, abased. She never smiles. . . . Well, perhaps to-day she will. Perhaps unable to control her Royal spasms she will laugh that the whole Court will snigger. It will be inexpressibly amusing when I sprawl. Or she may be too tired to wait. I may miss her. Let me miss her. I shan't be afraid of the Prince. Make her go before I come. Let her be too tired. Pray God be with me now, . . .

We have arrived.

The crimson curtains at the foot of the Grand Staircase are drawn back, and, crushed like flowers in a bouquet, the white creatures push forward and upward. The staircase is one vast rosary alive with trembling blooms; cream-tinted, sweetly adolescent shoulders veiled in mists of tulle, soft as the morning, fresh as the spring; girls of all colours, blonde, brunette, *rousse*, some golden fair and lovely, some plain and pimply . . . ah! a glimpse to my right of the Ladies Maud and Dorothy B——. Their eyes fixed stolidly ahead, stare like the glass eyes in melting waxen masks. Step by step, shoulder to shoulder, in united martyrdom we mount.

I have lost Belle, but have been warned: "It will be almost impossible for us to stay together. If we are separated, don't worry. You know what to do. Just follow the girl in front. You have your card? Don't lose it. Good luck, my dear. You look sweet."

I squeeze her hand in wordless agonized farewell. My last prop gone.

Up and up. . . .

Excelsior.

Was there ever so much crimson in the world? We enter a gallery enclosed within marble walls and plastered with heads in bas-relief. Marble mantelshelves are laden with collections of rare porcelain. Sèvres. What would happen if somebody's feathers knocked one of those pieces off? . . . There are cabinets of tortoise-shell, buhl and inlaid ivory. There are statues, pedestals and busts, and Frith's picture of the marriage of the Prince of Wales. O God, let it be the Prince and not the Queen. . . . And now on through massive doors to the State Ball-room. We are less congested here. Again I find myself beside the Sisters B——. This time I catch the eye of one. I smile faintly; she smiles back, and whispers: "Didn't I see you at Madame Clarice's?" So my grotesque array has not entirely transformed me.

"Yes, I remember you quite well."

I wonder—are they twins? They are as alike as two peas in a pod. "So hot," she murmurs, "Dolly, do you remember——?"

Dolly, too, remembers. We tell each other we are very hot. And thirsty. "But perhaps," I whisper hopefully, "we will be offered lemonade."

"No, we shall get nothing to drink. There is never any refreshment offered."

Of course. I had forgotten, and am now aware of an increasing thirst. My mouth is dry, my tongue thickens, my white camellias turn yellow in the heat, and under the fierce embrace of my corsets my chemise sticks, clammy, to my skin.

More crimson on the walls, and some pictures of the Muses: and at the far end an immense gilded organ used for state concerts.

And now we come to the first of the 'crush barriers,' guarded by a Gentleman-at-Arms. Through this gate and from one great room to another we pass, hot, weary, weighted by our trains which we carry on one arm, and which, without aid, we cannot shift for our relief. The Blue Drawing-room is a welcome change

from red. More marble columns with gilded Corinthian cap and base, furniture of burnished gold upholstered in blue. . . . Blue curtains. There is a Van Dyck of Charles I and Henrietta Maria. I would like to stay and look: no time for that. I have lost the Sisters B——. My companion in misery is a pretty *rousse* with a nose as freckled as a cowslip. She sidles up to me and whispers—for we all speak as though in church—“How much longer, do you think, before we get there?”

“I am afraid——” I stop myself in time from saying hope—“that she’ll be gone before we get there. Aren’t you dying for some lemonade?”

“Yes, dying.”

We drift on together side by side. “I’ve been seeing red,” she giggles, “and now I’m seeing blue. The next one will be white—and that’s the last.”

Through more gates we pursue our *Via Dolorosa*, and now we are in the White Room—white and gold. The curtains are of golden silk, the floor carpeted in gold and white. Marble pillars support the ceiling which displays the rose, the shamrock and the thistle, gilded. We pass into the Picture Gallery. Uniformed officials take our cards. My nameless red-haired friend says: “I expected a much greater crowd than this. My sister was presented to the Viceroy in Dublin and she said it was a shocking crush. The Queen’s Drawing-rooms are never over-crowded. It will be our turn soon. Are you frightened?”

I am not frightened now. All sense is numb beyond my raging thirst. I try to concentrate attention on the pictures, but sight, stunned and dizzy with the vastness of these rooms, rejects immediate impressions. I am dimly conscious of a rash of scarlet uniforms, of glittering medals, swords, and always like a summer cloud the white foam of tulle and feathers. A blaze of sunlight streams through the windows, clear and pitiless, on strained young anxious faces. The stentorian blare of a band draws nearer, very near, as we approach. I have lost my red-haired friend and am alone again. I glance round at my fellow sufferers: some are hysterically giggling, some are pale, silent; one sits, her hand to her head, drooping, overcome with the stifling heat. Will no one offer her a glass of water? Our brains ache with suspense. Our stomachs sink, our tongues are stiff and cleave to our dry palates, our white flowers fade in our frenzied clutch.

The booming voice of the Lord Chamberlain calls a name. Another vestal passes.

Four . . . Three . . . Two more.

I can no longer move. I am reminded of a game I used to play with Mimi: when she called Halt, you stopped, stuck in an attitude, still as a statue. Not a quiver of a muscle was allowed. So I stand anchored. . . . Only one more now.

The arm that holds my train drops to my side, and, with the hiss of a snake, the burden of satin falls about my feet. I give a kick and am frantically entangled. O God, this is death!

Someone uniformed, emblazoned with medals, red-faced, iron-grey, silently comes forward to assist. His sword clanks as he stoops to spread out the yards of satin. He give me an encouraging nod and a smile from under his grizzled moustache. I lick my lips and swallow. The name of the girl in front of me is called: Miss Violet—something or other, presented by Lady—it sounded like Pigs-Trough.

And now . . . And now . . .

MISS JENNIFER DREW presented by MRS GUY HADDON.

The Gentlemen-at-Arms stand unstirring, motionless: light shimmers dazzlingly on the rows of medals, on the hilts of swords. Are they men or dummies? The Throne is on my left. I lift my eyes; my head lifts, too. I see her, seated there in black, so still, so small . . . smaller than I. . . . What a weary, sad old face, that drooping mouth, those folds of sagging flesh above the flashing jewels, the blue ribbon and the Star amid a galaxy of orders. A little grey old woman in a widow's cap. Fear dissolves in pride, not of her, but of her great Empire. It is not this dumpy little hand, swollen with rheumatism under the white kid, that I now kiss, but the symbol of the might of Britain. Monarchy . . . I rise, I back. The old face, carved in its ponderous severity, never changes its expression, but I fancy that the filmed eyes flicker for a second under the tired lids. . . . I glide on, and curtsy to a Beard, a jovial twinkling eye; and now I feel that I can go on curtseying for ever. I curtsy to a very beautiful lady who smiles that my heart turns faint with love. I curtsy to a slight, fair-haired young man in naval uniform, and to a tall Princess. I rise again, I pass behind the barrier of Gentlemen-at-Arms; another name is called. . . .

My Day is done.

VI

It is curious how the distant years stand out so much more vividly than the immediate past. As time surges forward, sharper contours fade. Though sight grows dim, visions, memories, the living presence of those little spirits that press their faces to the windows of old age, are seen clearer through a long perspective. There is no time nor space along this backward journey through life's seasons. . . . Spring, its green unburdened heart, its wistful ecstasy; summer's wealth of blossom, its brooding storms and mastering heat, these stay with me unblurred by haze of autumn mists or the grey winter's loneliness, while the crowded years beyond become impatient; they, too, must have their turn, but they are fogged; there is so much—so much, and yet so little. Any woman's life might tell the same—except, maybe, for that one tragic interlude spun between light and darkness. And yet, for all its fearful joys, its poignant sorrow, if I were given back my youth again I would not have it different.

After my presentation, comes a pause. Yet, although my first season must surely have been filled with incidents, the kaleidoscope of dances, dinners, balls and strangers' faces, the repetitive remarks, the whirl of waltz and polka, a song, a phrase of music, a pressed rose-petal in my Bible—why did I keep that?—a programme hieroglyphically scrawled, recalling no man's name—these give me nothing.

I kept a diary, a bulky volume bound in morocco, bought with the sovereign Papa gave me for my eighteenth birthday. Only last week I came across that diary when I was turning out my deed-box to search for an insurance policy. . . . It meticulously notes each day but the record is uneventful.

July 18th, 1887. . . . The day Mimi left London for Paris.

'Had letter from Belle, inviting me to Crowthorpe for August. She says it will be dull because she is in mourning for her

father-in-law. I don't mind. It will be better than going to Dieppe with Papa and Selina and I shall be able to see Nurse every day. Said Good-bye to Mimi after breakfast. Shall miss her dreadfully. She was up and dressed and looked lovely in a pearl grey dolman with a little highwayman's cape and old-fashioned bonnet lined with pink quilted satin. With her white face and smoky eyes she was like the inside of an oyster shell. I asked her if she were travelling alone but she said No, luckily Jonathan was going too, *en route* for Baden where he is to meet his father, Lord Curraghmore, who is taking a cure. I believe if Papa had known the O'Connors were related to the peerage, even if it were only an Irish one, he would not have been so awful about my visiting them "socially" and might even have swallowed Mimi. It is a vile thundery day, very depressing. After seeing Mimi went to Augner's and bought the Grieg Concerto. Saw a cab-horse fall down at the top of Bond Street, half dead I suppose. He started kicking and a man sat on his head to keep him quiet. I shall never get used to the pain of things like over-worked thin horses and old blind people selling matches with dogs sitting up in little hats to beg. Why is life so sad? There is sadness in the Grieg Concerto too—a sort of desperate longing. That first movement is almost unbearable. I couldn't wait to get home. Undid the parcel and read the score going along. Selina said it is not ladylike to go out alone unless one carries a parcel. How I hate it all—ladylike or *unladylike*—"By these shall our enmities live." Did I read that somewhere or make it up? If only I could be allowed to play the Grieg Concerto with orchestral accompaniment *once* before I die. If only I could! Mike says I would even now be up to concert pitch if I were to study seriously at the Conservatoire or at the R.A. of Music here. Papa would never let me. Another dance to-night at the Stamforths'. Don't much want to go. Dances are always the same. This is the last one this season, thank goodness. Fancy not wanting to go to a dance. I must be very peculiar. I hope I shan't get like Aunt Rosie. . . .

I left London for Crowthorpe at the end of that week. Belle's father-in-law, having died of a stroke shortly after my presentation, Laura stayed up at Belle's Park Street house to see me through the London season.

My diary records no outstanding success, but one or two

young men, I think, paid me attention. A Mr Harcourt-Smith called every Sunday. He had a painful stutter and hair the colour of marmalade. Selina did the talking while he and I sat dumb. Selina said 'They' were wholesale chemists, and that my father would never allow me to descend to trade, but it would be as well to keep him on a string, one never knew. . . . And there was another, swarthily dark, lame, and very ugly, who affected a Byronic pose, held decided political views and was a great champion of Gladstone. All very well for Belle to tell me never to talk politics—Mr—— (what was his name? I have forgotten) talked of nothing else. He wrote poetry, too, and sent me a set of verses, 'To Jennifer,' beginning:

'From the seduction of her boyish angles
I turn t'unthread her temperamental tangles—'

He used to call regularly on Selina's Days, every third Wednesday, and then after a while he ceased to come. I have an idea he asked Papa's permission to pay his addresses, because Papa said it was a pity I had such a fatal attraction for the Mum and the Halt—neither of whom could keep me in pocket money, and that I was the stuff of which spinsters are made.

I really think the fact that no eligible offer came my way during my first season was genuine disappointment to him, particularly as Guy Haddon's niece, May—always rammed down my throat as a paragon of beauty and virtue—had secured the son of an eminent Q.C. whom Papa greatly respected.

He came to the station to see me off, saying as he put me in the train: "No chance for you there, I suppose, since Belle is not entertaining just now. God helps those who help themselves, but don't forget it is I who have to keep you. If you don't marry within the next two years you never will. Your looks won't help you, for you have none."

All this in an undertone before he handed me into a compartment marked Ladies Only which contained one other occupant, a pretty stylish woman in the opposite corner seat. To her he gave a very good imitation of a fond father's farewell to his daughter.

"Now you are sure you haven't forgotten anything—is your dressing-bag labelled? Don't leave it behind. You will be met at Lewes. Have you something to read? A book? A magazine? Boy! Boy!" He brought me an *Illustrated London News*. "Write to me as soon as you arrive. My love to Belle. Good-bye, my dear, God

bless you." His eyes strayed to the pretty lady who allowed hers a moment to linger. "You will excuse me if I go now? I am due at the Courts at eleven——" But he did not move until a prolonged whistle announced that the train was starting, and then his long smiling stare was not for me.

I hoped the pretty lady was impressed. I could not help but feel a little proud of him, so sleek, well-trimmed and handsome. And shutting out the vision of his face as I had seen it on that not-to-be-remembered night, I, too, played my part of a loving daughter, kissing her hand in farewell to her kind Papa—which performance was somewhat obliterated by the hurried flash past of a gentleman in a Norfolk suit and deer-stalker cap, who flung himself into the next compartment only just in time.

On the platform at Lewes, while I waited for Belle's maid to sort my trunks, I saw him again. That first glimpse had set me wondering—men look so different in tweeds. But now in this second glance I knew him at once, and hoped he might not see me . . . or hoped, perhaps, he would.

He looked twice, however, before he came towards me raising his cap: "Miss Drew?" with a query in his voice and recognition broadening his smile. "This is indeed a happy accident."

But in recollection of our last encounter, for me an awkward moment.

Ignoring my confusion, for I was undecided whether to cut him dead or give him the coldest of bows, he proceeded with an enviable ease, "Are you alone? Can I be of any assistance? Your luggage——?"

"Thank you." I compromised by gazing through him as though he were a pane of glass. "My sister's maid is collecting it."

"Your sister? Ah, of course—Mrs Haddon." My icy stare had no effect at all; he stayed unchilled. "You are visiting her?"

"Yes."

"What luck! I shall hope to see something of you. I live next door—not five miles from Crowthorpe. My dog-cart is waiting. May I drive you there?"

"No, thank you, my sister has sent the carriage."

"Then," he murmured, his eyes never leaving my face, "I take it I am not forgiven?"

"I can't imagine what you mean, Captain Titterton." And seeing Parker approaching with a porter, I sketched him the scantiest of bows and walked away.

He walked beside me. "So! Though I humble myself to the

dust, am a worm crawling here at your feet——” I hastened my steps; in one stride he out-raced me——“you remain adamant. And dumb?”

We had reached the barrier by this time. I rendered my ticket. He followed. We passed out into a glare of sunshine, where in front of the main entrance Belle’s brougham awaited my arrival.

“What a pity,” he reflected, “to drive eight miles in a stuffy closed carriage. The country here is charming. Do you know it?” I glanced round for Parker, who, with my dressing-bag, stood a pace or two behind us. “One has a much better view in the open. There is room for your maid at the back.”

I saw what I supposed was his dog-cart, a very smart turn-out drawn by a spanking grey with a cockaded groom in attendance. The brougham did look stuffy; the journey had been hot. I don’t know how I came to be persuaded, or perhaps the dancing sunshine may have thawed me: or I may have found him more attractive in his Harris tweeds than when I had last seen him, a tailor’s dummy in a boiled shirt—but the fact remains that there was I perched beside him in his dog-cart, and Parker on the back seat with the groom.

During the drive he maintained a steady flow of small talk. He was on eight weeks’ furlough, and then might likely be sent to the ends of the earth—a soldier’s life was in the hands of the gods—but a grand life for all that.

I said, yes, I supposed so.

And what did I think of Crowthorpe? A fine place. I knew it well, of course?

I told him, No, this was my first visit.

Then he hoped he would have the pleasure of showing me the country hereabout. Would I be coming down for the cubbing?

For the what?

Did I not hunt?

No, I didn’t hunt.

Nor ride?

Nor ride.

He would like to teach me. There was much, he said, and brought his face round to mine with a laugh in his breath—that he would like to teach me. And how had I enjoyed my first season as a fully fledged debutante? How many scalps to my credit? Did I collect broken hearts? If so he could make me a present of one—not entirely shattered, but a trifle bruised. Would I not admit that I had been a little cruel?

I knew what was expected of me. During my few weeks' 'out' I had learned how to respond to these masculine inanities. True, I was not yet adept in the accidence of flirting, but I did not now take broadest compliment or lightest badinage *au grand serieux*. So, with a flutter of my eyelids, I murmured, "Captain Titterton!" A giggle: "You are really too absurd."

This sufficed to offer more encouragement. "And you are too enchanting."

And then more business with the eyes before one says—"And you're a flatterer, I fear."

Yes, I knew all the tricks and was trained to display them, jumping through the hoop to his direction. And in this way we came to a lodge standing back from the road behind a holly hedge, and there was Nurse, her face bursting with smiles, holding wide the gates for us to drive in.

"Please," I cried, "stop! I want to get out—I must get out—just for a minute."

He reined up his horse almost on its haunches.

"What's the matter?"

"If I may—just to speak to her—please."

I could hardly wait for the groom to help me down and was in her arms hugging her, regardless of them all—Hugh's raised eyebrows, the groom, and Parker's stare, until she whispered, "Run along now, my lovey, you can come and see me later and tell me all about it. Your young man's waiting for you."

That pulled me up, and hot in the ears I clambered back to my seat.

I felt that his silence demanded an apology for my extraordinary behaviour.

"It's my old Nurse. I've not seen her for ages. She very seldom comes to London, and I have never been down here before. She was Nurse to my sisters, too."

He nodded. "Ah! Quite an old friend of the family." But I think he was a little startled, if not shocked. Such condescension to the lower orders should be private; one did not hug and kiss an old woman in an apron and mob-cap for all the world and his groom to see.

Belle, in deepest black, received us, and seemed not at all displeased, I think, to find me thus attended. Captain Titterton, however, refused her invitation to stay for luncheon. His mother, he explained, was expecting him and would imagine some appalling railway disaster had occurred if he did not

appear to time. But perhaps—he glanced at me—he might be permitted to call?

Belle expressed her delight. "Oh, do! Of course, I am not entertaining now owing to our——" she hushed her voice—"great loss."

I could not but think that her father-in-law's death was less loss than gain to her, since she was now mistress of this beautiful old house, bought with the Haddon money from the bankrupt estate of its owner. "But as we are such near neighbours," she continued, "I hope you will often come over for a game of croquet or lawn tennis. Will you be staying here all August?"

"Possibly, or at least until the Twelfth," he said, and drove away, leaving Belle to bombard me with questions.

How did I manage to get hold of *him*? Had we met lately in London? Had we travelled down together? Did Papa see him—or was it a rendezvous, if so——

I interrupted: "I've never set eyes on him since the night of your dance. We met on the station at Lewes."

"Still, you must have made some impression for him to go out of his way to drive you here. He thinks no end of himself, and never stoops to anything less than the daughter of a peer. They are the greatest snobs in the county. Heaven knows why, for there is no family behind them. His father hasn't an aitch. It was only their money got him in the Guards. His grandfather was in hides—raw hides."

"Fancy!" I murmured, "not even the beer sinister."

Belle gave me a furious look.

"That remark is not witty, but vulgar. However, I suppose you can't help your origin—blood will always out." The first direct hit she had ever made at my mother: "Parker will take you to your room."

She left me contrite. What could have possessed me to rile her the moment I entered the house? And during luncheon, which we took alone, I was at pains to guard my tongue and mind my manners, listening with adequate attention to my sister's recital of complaints.

Guy was resigning his commission—the estate would take up all his time in future. It had been sadly neglected of late. Most of the farms and cottages were in need of repair, and the tenants very troublesome. These labourers were always screaming for more wages, and the farmers for reduction of rent. Really, some of these people were absolutely uncivilized.

"If you could *see* the filth in which they live—worse than pigs. They have no sense of decency. I am so afraid that Guy—who between ourselves is rather weak—will give in to their demands, which would be fatal. The only way to keep these people down is by stern measures. Of course, where repairs are necessary—leaking roofs and so on—they must be done, but when they start clamouring for indoor sanitation—Good heavens! What next?"

As for this house, it was, Belle said, a mausoleum, and it would need entirely redecorating if it was to be made habitable. Just imagine—only one bath-room for a house of this size, and that had only been put in the year before the old man died. They had been trying to persuade him ever since bath-rooms became the thing, to have at least two more installed—but no. He was always so pig-headed. Now *they* would have to do it—a nice expense for Guy. As for the bedrooms—"You never saw anything so dreadful. Poor old Mrs Haddon had no taste at all, and of latter years being such a confirmed invalid, she let everything go to rack and ruin. Also—you know—not *quite* top-drawer—she had no idea—though one should not speak ill of the dead—how to manage servants. I have had to dismiss half the staff already and am bringing over ours from Petworth. The children are still there as I am having the nurseries here redone. The painters are working just above your bedroom. I hope you don't mind the smell of paint."

I didn't mind the smell of paint, but I was sorry to hear the children were not at Crowthorpe. I had been looking forward to seeing those two. . . . Such dear little boys, George and Philip. Both lost in the last Great War. Yes, Belle, too, had her load of sorrow. And now George's son has been killed at Dunkirk, and Philip's daughter is in khaki. . . .

A new race has been bred from the blood of those slaughtered young fathers. A new world will rise up from the dead on the wings of the gods of the air, from the wombs of the women who fight side by side with their men, that their sons shall inherit the peace of the earth in its freedom.

* * *

I have lost myself a little here, or perhaps I do not much care to remember an interlude in which I play a not too creditable part, a puppet that moves without volition, unfaithful to its inner consciousness, that stands aside and wonders—is this I? We are

composed, I think, of multiple 'I's' for many lives are lived within this one, and which of them all in the confusion of idiot voices each screaming 'this is I,' may be recognized as master—who can tell?

The Jennifer Drew who in her diary meticulously records the trivial, though to her no doubt significant, march of these summer days, is unfamiliar—more, is utterly unknown to me, watching from this far distance. I am looking at a stranger. She draws nearer in her early years and very near again through the brief spasm and the passing of first love. But through the pages of my diary in this month of August more than fifty years ago, I cannot see her clearly.

I see, however, a monotony of repetition in her observances of the account:

'Hugh Titterton again for tea and croquet. I played shockingly. Belle made me nervous watching . . .'

'Hugh Titterton for luncheon.' 'Tea. . . . A picnic. Guy, Belle and the vicar's two daughters and Hugh Titterton. Belle said that the vicar's two daughters would be quite safe to invite being plain and in the thirties. "We must go carefully now," she said, "we must not look too eager. I shall offer no more invitations till he asks for one. This is the critical week. If you play your cards now you can land him. . . ." Do I want to land him? I don't believe he can be serious. He is bored down here and is passing the time with me. He is a desperate flirt and very spoiled. I cannot remember anything he said to me or I to him. This I find a little frightening. It is as if we talked to each other in our sleep. When one dreams one can see the people's faces, but one seldom hears them speak. One's own thoughts, I think, speak for them. So it is with Hugh and I together. Can it be that we are both asleep? Perhaps most of us are—all through life asleep. No. There is nothing to remember only that yesterday he stopped calling me Miss Drew and said Miss Jenny. To-morrow he will drop the Miss, I expect. It is the Twelfth, and he hasn't gone to Scotland. Belle says things are coming to a "head." I feel absolutely numb. I have no thoughts left. I am truly like a person fast asleep . . . but I love the country here. One might be happy living in the country.'

Yes, I loved Crowthorpe, that long Georgian house set in a valley among low-lying hills. I loved the green spaces, the

solemn old trees, the myriad offerings of flowers, the pied cattle grazing knee-deep in meadow grass under a flax-blue sky and clouds unimaginably white; movement, scent and song, the shadows of leaves upon sunlight, and above all the absence of human beings: such things to me—a Cockney bred—were a marvellous rare joy to wonder at and worship. To see was not enough. I wanted to possess, to take something from the core of life, to share the miracle of this stored passion of the earth that poured its gladness into wild blossom and the springing corn, the muted symphony of summer's voice, the scherzo clamour of bird-notes, the murmur of great drunken bees and the slow andante of red sunset evenings. In these I live again, alone, unshared . . . until in the lingering gold of some hot lazy afternoon I hear Belle's voice beside me sharp, staccato, breaking through a drowsy lost refrain.

"Things are coming to a head . . . you could have clinched it a week ago if you had any sense. Honestly, I think sometimes you're wanting."

"Wanting what?"

"Send me patience!" Belle uttered fervently. Seated upright in her cushioned garden chair, the dappled light playing on the jet beads of her mourning, she fanned herself with a Japanese fan. "This heat! As if it isn't bad enough to be weighed down with crape—I shall wear white to-morrow. He is coming to dinner. Afterwards I shall contrive to leave you alone. He had a long talk with Guy yesterday, treating him *in loco parentis*, which is very gentlemanlike and proper. I have written to Papa——"

"What did he talk to Guy about?"

"My gracious, child! You, of course. The man must be quite mad in love to overlook such crass stupidity. He has spoken to Guy—has revealed his intentions. To-morrow he will ask you."

"And you really think——" I felt a sinking as I said it—"that he wants to *marry* me?"

"Yes," snapped Belle, "he does. I can't imagine why—or how you've done it—but he does. The best match in the county. He'll have heaven knows what when his father dies—and that gorgeous place, to say nothing of seven or eight thousand a year to play with *now*, besides being exceptionally good-looking. You're a very lucky girl, my dear." Belle closed her lips.

I opened mine. "Why am I lucky? It's not lucky to marry a man you don't love."

It was out, and having said it I felt lighter. Now I knew the

weight that during these last days had overburdened me; the weight of fear, suspense, intangible, yet dragging me along with it against my will, against my thought, desire, reason: now I knew.

"I don't love him," I repeated. "he isn't real. It would be like living with the—dead."

Belle's eyes, stonily blue, had widened.

"You really are the most extraordinary creature!" She leaned forward, her basket chair creaked with the movement. "Listen to me." Her voice crisped through her teeth. "I am going to talk to you now once and for all. And if you don't take to heart what I say——" I had never known her so threatening—so like Papa. It was as though I heard him speaking through her, and I flinched while her words lashed me with their bitter truth, unveiling my future, showing me what I must face, how I must live, growing older, turning sour, bullied by Papa, pitied by the world as a failure, unless I chose escape—and my salvation. I was no beauty. (I need not, surely, be so often told so?)—I had talent, yes. But where would that talent lead? To a dead end. No girl in my position could be allowed to carve a career in music for herself, even if she were good enough to attain to concert height, which I was not. As for this romantic talk of love—"Let me tell you, my dear, that love and marriage seldom go hand in hand. The one is a passing phase, a calfish infection like measles, the other endures for life. But how *you* can dare to say you don't love him! You should be honoured. Any girl would fall at his feet."

I muttered: "Perhaps that's why I don't."

She passed this over, hurrying on with her torrent of words that seemed to bear me with them towards some unseen whirlpool while I drifted, silent, knowing myself helpless to resist.

"You can't afford to *wait* until you love. *You* can't pick and choose. I tell you frankly I am utterly amazed that he should want you. I suppose you attracted him in the first place by your playing—otherwise I don't think he would have noticed you. You have *me* to thank for that. It was I who insisted that night of my dance—do you remember?—that you should play, and that impressed him. The fact that you have not run after him—have kept him at arm's length—has probably made him all the keener. I don't know whether you are a born coquette or the most innocent of fools, but either way you've landed him, my dear, and for the love of God I pray you not to let him slip. If you refuse him now he won't come begging. Yes, I know you're

very young—but a girl's life is short, one season, two—and you are not all men's taste. There are many who would find you insipid. A third season out, perhaps a fourth—and after that—you're finished. Even your playing won't help you then. Some men might be put off by it. You play too well." She paused for breath.

I watched the flight and dart of swallows, the sunshine like gold powder on fringed branches; the blaze of flowers in the herbaceous border stood drenched and quivering in that fierce downpour of light. I saw a bumble-bee crawl into the heart of a hollyhock and cling with thick hairy legs, probing. The rosy petals swayed and trembled. . . . From a long way off I heard my own voice say: "It is a sin to give oneself to any man unless one loves."

"What do you mean, 'give'?" Belle queried sharply. "A woman doesn't have to *give*. It is the man who gives—his name and his protection—the security of his home. And don't, pray, talk of '*giving*' yourself to a man when he proposes. You really must be more restrained."

The arrival of tea brought to us on the lawn put an end to this discussion. Guy joined us and was, as usual, monosyllabic, placidly munching cucumber sandwiches. What, I wondered, were his thoughts behind that gentle face of his, long and rather like a sheep's with dust-coloured hair and moustache. Had Belle been 'in love' with him when they married? And what was this 'love' of which one read—and dreamed? A swift haphazard thing, a meeting and a parting, a moment's ecstasy and then forgetfulness: a kiss, a touch, a whisper, was that love? And what did Belle mean—'more restrained'? Surely loving was giving—to render oneself, to be merged one in another, to live for that other, to share life undivided, to hold no secret thought away from him. Or it might be a storm, a drama of death and rhapsody as in 'Tristan and Isolde,' in which the universe and love is one in essence; and I thought of that supreme orchestral transport of the Liebestod and Isolde's words: 'But our love,' she asks, 'is not its name Tristan—and Isolde? And if Tristan went alone to death that bond would be disturbed.' So that they two must die together, one for all eternity. . . . Or it might be a steady flame of two united, burning like a candle on a shrine, to guide you through the way of life towards fulfilment.

But this I knew: that Hugh Titterton would never light a candle in my soul to burn for him.

I lay long awake that night straying through a maze of indecision, hearing the parrot repetition of Belle's words, 'A girl's life is short . . . one season . . . two . . .', forcing myself to face the issues now at stake. There must be no shirking of the truth and no evasion. I must marry. That one fact stood out clear in the confused babel of my thoughts. Papa had said I was the stuff of which spinsters are made. It would be something achieved to return to him, engaged. And if I did not, what then? Could I endure to live under his roof, stung by his taunts, his steel-edged thrusts veiled in smiling sarcasm? And if this should prove to be my only chance, what future could I look to, or what hope? I could see none. I would gradually become more spiteful, thin and sour, sharp—yes, I knew how I would be a few years hence, unliked, unlikeable . . . unloved. At first I would not notice I had changed. The dreary round of seasons would recur, the same invitations, dances, dinners, the same ball-room chatter, the same faces, for a while; then they would drift away, all those young girls who were my contemporaries. To some of them perhaps I would be bridesmaid. Guy Haddon's niece May, and Harry Woodstock's sister—to both these I was already pledged, and everyone would say, 'It's your turn next,' but my turn never came, although I still determinedly went on accepting invitations, growing thinner and more shrivelled every year, recognized in every ball-room by chaperons who had successfully convoyed their elder daughters into harbour and now launched a younger brood. 'There's that Miss Drew again, she's getting on but won't give up. She must be twenty-eight, poor thing . . . rather like a little wizened hen.'

Here, then, the two alternatives. A life of slow disintegration, untenanted, dragging the empty waste of youth behind it in the dust of disappointment, or—the submerging of all dreams and all desires, all eager gay unrest and secret longings in the calm sea of complacency.

There could be but one answer, one choice.

* * *

We had dined early. The last of the sun still lingered on the tree-tops, and through the window open wide upon the garden, a warm fragrance drifted, honey-thick, oppressive. Beyond the ripening orchard where the first fruit clustered glowing under green apple-leaves, the fields bereft of workers now, gathered loneliness and darkened, while great heavy clouds banked in the east menaced the fading light.

Hugh said: "I think we shall have thunder."

He seemed to fill the room as he turned from his contemplation of the sky to me. His words were chosen carefully as though he had rehearsed them. Esteem. Affection. . . . From the moment he had met me he had been irresistibly attracted. I must have known, must have seen even in so short a time. . . .

All was as it should be and as I had read in books of a young girl's first proposal. Only her response was lacking in this dull no-feeling that held me chained and frozen. In dreams it had been different; a flame of all the senses to light a fever in the blood, a throbbing ecstasy that left you fainting, weak, but never numb.

"... And may I hope that you could care enough for me . . . ?" His smile supplied the answer to that pause. Who but the blindest of fools would not prostrate herself in blissful thanksgiving to him and God for this beneficence? My silence could only be mistaken for consent.

My hands were seized. I was dragged from my chair to be clasped. He was masterful, triumphant. "Dear shy little girl! Do you love me?" Hurriedly I disengaged as his face stooped to mine. "Say it," he urged, "I must hear you say that you love me."

I bleated: "I don't—I can't—do you?"

Such silliness was not to be believed; nor did he believe it. He laughed and found my hands again and held them tight against his boiled shirt. "How adorable you are! Would you have me on my knees?" He gave a rueful glance at his faultless trousers, "I would be if this suit were not brand new." He dropped his bantering tone and squeezed my hands tighter, crushing them. "Will you marry me, Jenny?" A peremptory note crept into his voice. "Don't play with me."

I remembered reading that, too, in a book. Almost all the latest heroes said 'Don't play with me.'

I felt a smile slide crooked on my lips, and jerked it back to tell him, "I am very far from playful."

His eyebrows lifted; his eyes sought mine, piercingly. He opened his mouth to speak, but I forestalled him. The numb feeling had vanished, and although I had such a long way to look up at him I did not seem so small.

"Captain Titterton——"

"Must you," he interrupted, "be so formal?"

I went firmly on, recalling novelettes. "I am not un-mindful of the honour you have paid me. I am indeed

considerably moved. But I think it only right and fair to tell you——”

“Not, I hope, that there is someone else?”

“There’s no one else. You are quite the first—oh!” I gave a yelp; his hands were very strong. “Must you do that?”

He muttered, “Darling,” and loosening his hands took all of me instead. Yes, he was very masterful. I submitted, watching myself and him as though we were two people in a play. His eyes were closed. I tore myself out of his arms, not quite so cool as I had thought to be, with my hand to my bruised mouth and my eyes on his that now were very bright and swimming.

“I suppose,” I said, keeping my voice steady, “this means that we’re engaged.”

“Like hell it does!” Again I felt my lips possessed. “And now,” he whispered, “are you going to tell me you don’t love me?”

I nodded: he could make what he liked of that.

Another night of restless sleep from which I woke at six, unrefreshed, and went out to a sunless day, cool and soft, with more promise of rain.

In the entrance hall the maids, busy with dusters and brooms, stared to see me up so early. Taking a short cut through a part of the garden sunk between yew hedges, I followed a path across the paddock that led to the lower end of the drive near the lodge. I must be the first to tell Nurse my news.

I found her in the kitchen-parlour frying bacon. Under the lattice window her sister Phœbe lay in bed.

Phœbe, a widow now, had, so Nurse informed me, taken to her bed shortly after her husband’s death and had stayed there ever since. “A living tomb,” Nurse called her, “stiff from the feet up, but ever so bright. A lesson to all I say, and let them who grumbles at God’s blessings take a look at her. Never a word of complaint, can’t even sit to feed herself. True it is that the ways of the Lord works uncanny, but always in the end you find the meanin’ of what at first you mightn’t understand. When I left you four years ago it seemed like the end of the world for me, to tell you the truth; for the wrench it was to hand you over to the unwholesome mercies of that Dowson—never have I felt anything to my heart’s core so much nor ever will again. But now you see how it works out for the best. Here’s Phœbe helpless as the day she was born, and here was I on the spot when her man fell off a ladder repairing the thatch, and died of a broken skull. Then Phœbe, who’s been poorly ever since from shock,

suddenly collapses—laid out for dead I thought—and better, poor soul, if she had been, since she may live like this for years. But as I say, the Lord's ways aren't our ways, and howsoever bad things seem to be, they work together for good in the end which is how I've always seen it."

And of which involved philosophy I was reminded when I went to visit Nurse that sunless morning.

Phœbe saw me first, for Nurse's back was turned, and Phœbe smiled lying there in her frilled nightcap against the spotless white. Her face, plump and rosily shining from recent soap, showed not a shadow of pain. Incredible to think of her as 'a living tomb.'

"I've had a prickin' in me thumbs," Phœbe called from her pillows, "and that always means with me a nice surprise."

Nurse wheeled round and saw me, folding in her lips. "'Ave you had your breakfast?"

I shook my head, still standing in the doorway.

"Then it's ready for you now." She lifted the sizzling pan off the fire and bade me sit down while she bustled about, laying a fresh cloth on the table and bringing her best willow-pattern china from the dresser. To please her I tried to eat but could do no more than nibble toast and sip a cup of scalding tea to burn my tongue.

"I hope it *is* a nice surprise," said Nurse, with her sniff, "that's all." She eyed my plate of untouched egg and bacon. "Waste not, want not. That egg's warm from the nest this morning—it's a prime cut of gammon back, too. Sinful I call it, to turn up your nose at good food."

I rose and went to her, putting my arms round her waist, to whisper: "You're so fat—they won't meet now." And hiding my face against her starched front I told her, "I'm going to be married."

I felt her starchiness heave, and heard Phœbe saying, "I knew it! There was a bell in my tea-cup last night, and a ring. I told you we'd 'ear of a wedding."

Nurse said nothing.

I took myself away from her, sat down by Phœbe's bed, and stroked her hand where it lay, red and limp on the patchwork quilt. I said: "You're as good as Aunt Rosie with your fortunes; they always come true."

She could turn her head from side to side; she turned it then to look at me. "I wish you much joy, my lovey. Give me a kiss for luck."

I put my lips to her smooth uncreased forehead. She smelled faintly of apples.

Nurse spoke. "Is it that Captain Titterton from Dunmore?" I nodded.

"I thought as much." She closed her mouth, and stood there monumentally, in silence. I went on stroking Phœbe's hand, while Phœbe went on talking.

"Things get about even to me lyin' 'ere, or as I tell Lott, it may be that when the body 'as no work to do, the mind gets busy thinkin'." But when Captain Titterton's dog-cart began to pass these gates six days out of seven from the very first day that you arrived perched up there beside him, I said to Lott, 'He don't come to see Mrs Haddon.' "

Yes: I had forgotten that Nurse would have opened the gates to him every time he drove in or out.

I looked at her steadily, forcing her eyes to meet mine.

"Well? And what do you think of him? He's very handsome, isn't he—and charming?"

Nurse gave a nod. "All that and more besides."

"Rich as Creases," chimed in Phœbe.

"And a very gallant soldier," I said, still looking at Nurse. "He was sent to Khartoum to the relief of General Gordon."

"Pity he got there too late," remarked Nurse.

"That weren't his fault," Phœbe said. "Poor Alf used to say the 'ole thing was shameful."

Nurse folded her lips again. I got up and stood squarely before her.

"You don't seem overwhelmed at my news. Aren't you glad?" My throat swelled. "I thought you'd be glad. I would have to be married some time. It isn't as if I were going to the other ends of the earth to be married. I shall be living down here in the country—perhaps. I'll make that a condition," I said, "that I come and live in the country. In a little cottage not far from you."

"I can see him," Nurse said, "in a cottage."

"You don't know him," I retorted. "You take the most ridiculous likes and dislikes—you always have, you always will."

"And who, pray," Nurse inquired, immovable, "has said I dislike him?"

"I don't suppose," I cried, ignoring this and rushing on, "that you've ever even spoken to him. And if you only *knew* how I've been pestered—by Belle. *And* Papa. I don't want to be an old maid. This might be my only chance. I'm not pretty

enough to pick and choose. Don't stare at me—say something, can't you?"

The long-pent-up emotion of weeks caught at my throat and exploded. Nurse held out her arms and I went to them and cried myself out on her chest. I heard her rusty voice saying:

"You're only eighteen. If he's not your heart's fancy, don't have him."

I rubbed my wet cheek against hers.

"But if it's for your happiness," Nurse said, "that's all that matters. Where's your handkerchief?"

I fumbled in my pocket and produced it.

"I'm just being silly," I muttered. "I didn't sleep well last night. Take no notice. . . ."

And I ran out of the cottage and up the avenue to the house like a mad thing.

Punctually at eleven, Hugh arrived in the dog-cart to drive me over to Dunmore. I was to lunch with, and be presented to, his parents. Belle advised me to wear 'something simple.' "Your blue muslin and shepherdess hat. And be very careful what you say. Let *them* do all the talking. It's always an ordeal to meet your future in-laws for the first time. I've warned you that they may not be quite-quite. *She's* not so bad—a doctor's daughter, but you'll find the old man rather startling. And, of course, they idolize Hugh. At least you're lucky that he's the only one. I had a cattery of sisters to contend with."

Hugh, whom I was permitted to see for five minutes alone in the drawing-room, suggested I should change my dress. It was, he thought, not altogether suitable for the country. "Have you any tweeds? You will find it chilly driving."

Having no tweeds I compromised with a navy-blue serge, trimmed with white braid which Belle said made me look like a charity school-child. "And you can't wear that hat with blue serge. You need a straw 'boater.'"

Nor did I possess a straw 'boater,' so Belle lent me one of hers, some sizes too big, that pressed painfully down on my forehead, and which Hugh, with a heartiness that did not at all deceive, declared charming.

My sister stood at the door to wave us away, and Nurse opened the gates at the lodge. I whispered to Hugh, "Won't you stop for a second and speak to her?"

He drove on. "No time, darling. On the way back, perhaps. She's such a surly old devil."

I fisted my hands. "She's not really surly; it's only her manner."

"I don't like her manner." He laid his whip to his horse's flank. "We're late." Then his face came round to mine with a smile. "And now are you going to be cross with me?"

"Oh, no," I said, cold. "No one could be cross with you."

"Am I so irresistible?"

"You should know. You must have often been told so. Don't you think——" I stared between the horse's ears—"that I am very lucky?"

"I think we're both very lucky. I wish you would remove that ridiculous hat. I can't see your face."

"You will see my face for the rest of your life, so it doesn't matter much if you can't see it now."

"I want to see it all the time—and always." He shifted the reins to his right hand to hold mine with his left. "My sweet—you are not being very sweet to me to-day. I hoped to see you bubbling with joy, instead of which I find you in the sulks. I think you have the deuce of a bad temper, my Jenny. If I remember rightly I had a taste of it the very first night we met. I presume this moodishness is due to the fact that I refused to stop and speak to your wicked old Nannie." And after a pause, "Have you really taken to heart what I said about the old woman, my darling? I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Shall we turn round and go back?"

I returned the pressure of his hand. "Of course not. We'll go on."

And I thought: There is no turning back. . . .

We approached Dunmore along an avenue of young elms, symmetrically planted. Belle had described the house as gorgeous, and so it seemed to be. Not more than thirty years old, its façade, built of brick in a mock Tudor style, had two jutting wings either side, almost but not utterly Gothic. The gardens, laid out in terraces, were formally Dutch and Italian. A wide-flagged loggia skirted the whole front of the house, on which reposed at intervals yew trees in tubs and two peacocks, amid a furnace of geraniums and calceolarias. A footman in powder and prune livery swung open the doors of a great hall, oaken-walled and lined with antlered heads and armour. A butler, with measured pomposity, announced me grateful for Hugh's nearness at that moment—to a vast room on the ground floor with tall mullioned windows of stained glass; on each pane a heraldic device.

This apartment was empty of occupants. The butler, murmuring, "I will inform madam," withdrew. I sat down in a blue velvet chair and stared at the portrait of a flaxen-haired child of indeterminate sex in a sky-blue velvet frock, facing me on the opposite wall. Over the white marble mantelpiece on which stood a black marble clock, two equestrian bronzes and some very good Delft, hung a more than life-sized painting of a stout and fiercely whiskered gentleman in a flowered waistcoat.

"My grandfather," Hugh stated. And pointing to the portrait of the child on the wall, he added, "and myself." Then sinking to his knees beside my chair he put his lips to my ear, whispering: "Perhaps you and I will place another there beside it."

Before I could collect myself to answer, the door opened and a plaintive voice said: "Hugh, darling, you're so late. Luncheon will be spoiled."

Hugh got upon his feet, and so did I.

Mrs Titterton, tall and languid, in some sort of floating garment, greenish blue or bluish green, rustled forward, took my hand and gazed at me intently. She had china-blue eyes, a pale bony face, a mouth that drooped a little at the corners, and a palpably false Grecian coiffure. I had the impression that she and her ensemble were taken directly from the drawings of du Maurier.

"You are much younger," she said in her far-away voice, "than I had expected from Hugh's description." And I felt my youth indeed a sad defect. "Take off your hat, my dear." Thankfully I drew out the pins that held Belle's boater to my hair. Hugh took it from me saying: Don't frighten her, Mater. She's a timid little creature. Where's the guv'nor?"

"Waiting," said Mrs Titterton, "for his luncheon. Would Jenny care to wash her hands?" Though the query was addressed in the third person, I took it to myself and was about to reply when she added with a smile that did not lift the drooping corners of her mouth, "I shall not call you Jenny. Your name is far too beautiful to be abbreviated . . . Jennifer Drew."

"But Jennifer Titterton," Hugh interposed, "is something of a mouthful."

"Jennifer," repeated Hugh's mother, who all this time had been holding my hand in hers. She now released it to sweep my hair from my forehead. I felt myself redden. She gazed.

"You poor sweet child. So that is why you wear that heavy fringe." Stooping, she kissed me, carefully rearranged my hair and sighed.

"Come, Mater," Hugh's face was even redder than mine; "don't embarrass her," and I wondered if he had received a shock, for I think until that moment he had not been aware of the extent of my blemish which I had always kept hidden.

The entrance of the master of the house came as a welcome interruption.

Mr Titterton, short, rotund and florid, bore more resemblance to the portrait over the mantelpiece than to his son. Not from the paternal side of his family had Hugh inherited his height or his good looks. Yet though his father, bald, pigeon-chested, with faded buff mutton-chop whiskers and small shrewd eyes of no colour, lacked physical distinction, one could well believe that inconspicuous exterior might house the heritage of industrial democracy, a heritage which half a century earlier had won through bloodless revolution to implant the fruits of strife within its sons. In 'raw hides,' Belle had said, lay the accumulation of this family's fortune. The grafting of animal skins upon gold: the transformation of brute labour into capital: the slow relentless tide of change and evolution from the earth's soil to the beasts of the field, through the vast mechanical constructions that gird the possessive interests of posterity, and those indestructible foundations of an age and race linked in one common cause in the fight for survival.

None of this, however, at the time was my impression. I am looking at him now from a very long perspective. I saw him then as he appeared in his externals and to my inexperience. His searching eye overswept and seemed to rid me of my garments, that I stood exposed before him thus to be weighed: 'A poor thing and no match for my son. A body not too graciously endowed to breed Apollos. . . .'

His hand extended and engulfed mine in a dry, horny clasp; a dubious lip protruded. "How de do, my dear? Pleased to meet you. H'ugh, you're late."

One gathered that the choice of his son's name enforcing care bestowed upon the aspirate, was all part of a rigid self-discipline. Master of his house; he was indeed.

"Come, children." Mrs Titterton with a despairing sigh led the way to the dining-room; her husband followed, marching ahead of us. Hugh sought my hand and squeezed it. I was glad of that much comfort.

The dining-room, even more vast than the apartment we had quitted, was like the hall, oak-panelled from floor to ceiling,

the walls displaying Mr and Mrs Titterton in massive gilt frames and Hugh in hunting pink. We sat, Hugh facing me across the table, and half-concealed by a silver epergne. Of general conversation there was none. Two footmen and a butler served us with what seemed to be an interminable succession of highly flavoured dishes. Mr Titterton addressed himself almost exclusively to his meal with an occasional remark thrown to his son on the relative advantages or disadvantages of one Carlotta, whose state of health seemed to be uncertain. Not until the appearance of the sweet did I realize Carlotta was a horse. And, "Did you call in at Granger's to h'ave a look at that colt?" he demanded.

Hugh said there was no time.

"What d'you mean—no time? You started early enough, didn't you. You could have called there on your way back. I thought that's why you were late."

And while he spoke his father stared at me, and I knew that he held me responsible for this omission, as no doubt I was; for if Hugh had not insisted I should change my dress . . . "All my life," Mr Titterton impressively proceeded, "I h'ave made punctuality a fixed rule—a starting-point, as you might say, to success. *Unpunctuality* shows a slipshod Mind and a slipshod Mind never got you anywhere." His eye, still holding mine, defied all contradiction; voicelessly I acquiesced, and he continued. "I employ," said Mr Titterton, "in my Works over and above a thousand h'ands. I deal in raw material, but more than that—I transform the raw material into your kid gloves, young lady—your boots, your trunks, and all your what-nots. All the leather that you use——"

"Really, sir," Hugh interrupted hastily, "what possible interest can Jenny find in this?" His face expressed profound disgust. I smiled.

"All the leather that you use," oratorically stated Mr Titterton, as though Hugh had not spoken, "passes through my Works in one form or another. And only by a rigid system of checking Time—the Time of arrival and departure of each one of my employees to the minute, can I keep my finger, so to speak, on the pulse of my 'uge Machine. I allow 'em one lapse and no more. One fall from Grace and at the second—out they go with a week's wage as forfeit."

"Greedy-greedy," murmured Mrs Titterton, which remark for one moment I quite thought was addressed to her husband, until I saw it was intended for the pug. "I had a letter," pensively

said Mrs Titterton, "from Charles by the second post. Too tiresome. He asks himself down here for a week. Poor boy, I can't refuse."

"Why not?" barked Mr Titterton.

"My poor dead sister's son," sighed Mrs Titterton, "it would be a kindness. He can't afford a holiday."

"Again," repeated Mr Titterton, "why not?" and before anyone could answer, "I'll tell you why not. Because he wastes his Time and such brains as he may h'ave on non-essentials. Doctorin's all very well for them as h'as money behind them and can set up a plate in H'arley Street and charge three guineas a visit, but to spend his Time and Energy in slums among the Poor who will never give a Thank You and still less a penny-piece for service rendered, will never get him anywhere. I'm a Liberal myself, but what I say is, it's only a fool who can afford to give h'is brains away—for they're worth nothing."

"So true," sighed Mrs Titterton. "Come, darling," to the pug; and to me—"We will take our coffee on the terrace, Jennifer."

As I followed her out, stepping carefully to avoid her train, I heard, "*She'll* never set the Thames afire, nor you, my boy—for long."

Sipping coffee under the pale eye of Hugh's Mamma, I knew too well that she endorsed her husband's views. Her smileless mouth declared her disappointment of Hugh's choice, while her queries, gently offered, probed for some accounting of his lack of taste, or for some charm from her as yet concealed. But I could give her none. My appearance fell below the standard of set beauty or mere prettiness. My social position, too, was inconsiderable. The Services, the Church, the Bar, these professions were above reproach; the daughter of a mere solicitor was not. True, I had been presented: "By your sister," asked Hugh's mother, "Mrs Haddon, I suppose? And have you not another sister, Lady——?"

"Woodstock," I mumbled, "yes."

"Ah!" She seized on this. So I was not entirely without redemption. "They must be the Derbyshire Woodstocks."

If they must, I thought, they must.

"And your brother-in-law, Sir Henry," Mrs Titterton pursued, "he is in the army, I understand. Where do they live?"

"They have never had a permanent address. My sister travels about with him whenever she can. She will be joining him in Malta this autumn."

Mrs Titterton nodded approval. "And with what regiment? The Guards?"

"The Rifle Brigade."

There followed then a catechism undisguised.

"These are your half-sisters?"

"Yes."

"Both a good deal older than yourself?"

"Yes."

"And you are—how old?"

"Eighteen."

"Quite too young, and looking even younger. Your mother's maiden name was——?"

"Brown."

"With an 'e'?"

"Without the 'e'." And the devil entered me to drive me on. "She was born at Barking. Her father was a captain in the Merchant Service. *Not* the Royal Navy. I have never met any relatives on my mother's side, though I suppose I must have some. She was my sisters' governess."

Mrs Titterton had closed her eyes: she opened them to lift her brows, but not the drooping corners of her mouth; even her lips were pale as she murmured, "Hugh has not told me this."

"I don't suppose he knew. It has been kept quiet."

"I see. And you have lost her?"

"In the sense of gone before," I said, "but not mislaid."

Faintly she reproved me.

"That, dear, is not quite respectful to the dead."

"My mother died when I was born." I managed to control my cracking voice, "I might perhaps have been a little—different—if she hadn't." Or if, I added voicelessly, I had died with her; and I bit my lip to hold it firm, and blinked the water from my eyes and stared fixedly at a flame of calceolarias.

"A motherless girl," Mrs Titterton plaintively agreed, "is always handicapped. Your father married *three* times, I understand?"

That, too, I felt was something of a slur. Twice might be permissible; three times suggested an unsavoury super-abundance of what—one didn't quite know.

"Your stepmother was a Mrs——?"

"Caswell."

The name carried as little weight as Brown without the 'e'.

"Hugh tells me you play the piano uncommonly well. Did you go to boarding-school?"

"No."

"You were taught at home?"

"Yes."

"So much the better. One is never sure what undesirable associates a girl may fall in with at boarding-school. Does your stepmamma do much entertaining?"

"It depends what you call entertaining."

"Dear," Mrs Titterton uttered remotely, "may I suggest that your manner is the least little bit abrupt? I don't wish to find fault in such early days, and I do not at all blame you. It is so sadly evident that you have lacked a mother's guidance, poor child. . . . Darling, don't snore." She leaned over the side of her chair to pick up the pug and place it on her lap. Its oozing eyes goggled balefully at me; its pink tongue came out to lick its dribbling nose. "She has such a nasty little cold," said Mrs Titterton. "You will forgive me, Jennifer dear, if I seem over-anxious for Hugh's happiness. He is everything to us; our only one. Marriage is no light undertaking. It is the be-all and end-all of a woman's life. And more than that. It is a sacrifice. Pure and simple."

Not always pure, I saved myself from saying, and never very simple.

"It has been, I confess," continued Mrs Titterton, "a little something of a shock. Hugh is so often *épris* with this one or that. There was, of course, the Honourable Miss Gallstone. We really thought it would come about, but it was not to be—a most unfortunate misunderstanding." She sighed. "He took it hardly, although he bore it well—with admirable courage."

"And turned to me for consolation," I put in, smiling.

"That, my dear, one may suppose. And if you have healed his hurt I am content." And fondling the pug's ears she gazed ahead at space. The arrival of her husband and her son put an end to an uncomfortable silence.

Mr Titterton saying, "Jenny and I'll go for a stroll in the Grounds," placed his hand under my elbow and steered me towards a temple of Corinthian design guarded by a yew at the end of the lower lawn. Here on a circular stone seat we sat; I, the prisoner in the dock, and he the counsel for the prosecution. But I had no counsel briefed for my defence.

"My son," began Mr Titterton, taking from his pocket a cigar case, "is very dear to us." Extracting a cigar, he smelled it and put it unlighted in his mouth with an inquiring glance at me.

"Please, smoke," I murmured; "I have no objection. Smoking, they say, soothes the nerves."

His eye frosted as it gazed. "You think I suffer from nerves, young lady, eh? That I need soothing?"

"I think," I offered diffidently, "that Hugh's engagement must have come as a surprise—and one that is not perhaps entirely agreeable."

He stared. "You're sharper than I thought. So I take it I can speak out straight—no h'edging?"

"I always prefer frankness, Mr Titterton."

A gleam, not altogether humourless, slid over his bulging cheeks.

"You'll get that and more from me, my dear. You're right. This engagement h'as come as a surprise to his mother and meself. H'ugh is an only child and I'm a self-made man. I h'aven't much to brag about in the way of breedin'. My father started life as a drover, and he ended up—h'ere." He jerked his head in the direction of the house, "and that, mark you, is an achievement. You can put it alongside the great successes of this era, even though it don't carry weight with the Nobs, or if you like it better, the Snobs. For let me tell you," said Mr Titterton profoundly, "them that h'as the benefit of birth and education are the greatest Snobs of all. To h'ave and to h'old is their motto. Jee swee—that's French—jee rest. But I'm not content to rest. I want more than the foot'old of mere security for my son. H'ugh is my H'eir. He'll inherit this property and all else besides that I may leave. I've managed to put him in a crack regiment socially above his sphere. You can call *me* a Snob." He looked at me fiercely. "I am. Aren't we all? It takes some in one way and some in another. The idea of betterment, of self-enlightenment, of education, is all founded on snobbery, though they call it by another name. Reform. Reform," vibrantly repeated Mr Titterton, "which one may interpret as the will to raise the level of 'umanity to one common plane. Sixty years ago my father fought for the brother'ood of man alongside the machine-breakers, *not* to bring the Rulin' Classes to his level, but to raise himself to theirs. And he went further. From the ashes of those same machines he raised the Phœnix, so to speak, of his own fortune. You've 'eard it said you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I'll say you can. I had hoped to see my son mated with the H'ighest in the Land. It's Blood and Breeding what I want for h'im, and there you 'ave it in a nutshell, young lady. I make no secret of my life's ambition.

But, mark you, in spite of that I put H'ugh's h'appiness before all else. If he's satisfied then I'll step down. Maybe I've aimed too h'igh."

He paused, rolling his unlit cigar between his lips; his glance upon me narrowed. "I should say you've more in you than bread and butter. You're very young, but not so young that you don't know your own 'eart's inclination. I'll ask you this. I've been straight with you so I expect a straight answer. Do you love my son?"

I felt the colour rush into my cheeks, and stammered: "Love? I don't know what you——"

He nodded. "As I thought. You *don't* love him, and lack of love's a sorry site to build a h'ome upon. And why," he, with virulence, demanded, "don't you love him? Ain't he good enough—a fine young feller and money to burn? What more do you want?"

I rose.

"Perhaps, like you, Mr Titterton, I aim too high. But if——" I halted on that word, then hurried on, "if I marry Hugh I will try to be all and to give all that he may ask of me."

He, too, rose, holding out his hand.

"I think that we'll get on together, you and I. He might do better, but again he might do worse. We'll keep this talk a secret, eh? Between ourselves. And so—forget it. Come along now and I'll show you round the gardens. All this'll be yours one day."

VII

PAPA wrote to me from Switzerland a somewhat involved and gushing letter announcing his satisfaction at the receipt of Belle's 'good news,' which he said far exceeded his expectations. He offered me whole-heartedly his unqualified consent to a match that met with his sincere approval. I had done more than well for myself. I was marrying a man of irreproachable character and sound, Nay—more than sound—of *exceptional* position. He was overjoyed to think that I his youngest, his Benjamin would be secure for life. It had been his heart's desire to see me settled with one to whom he could thankfully trust his beloved daughter, and that this had come to pass was indeed a Mercy for which he hoped I was not ungrateful to the Divine Interpreter of a Father's fervent prayer.

He was writing, he said, to his dear Son-to-be by this same post. He offered me again his most loving felicitations and would immediately upon his return prepare the same Deed of Settlement already bestowed upon Belle and Laura to be signed and sealed the day before the wedding, which he trusted would take place not later than December of this year as he did not at all approve of long engagements. And with fond love I was to believe him ever my most affectionate Father.

Hugh, too, was in favour of a short engagement. There was no object in waiting, he said. He would in any case be returning to Ireland in September and rumour had it—although not yet officially confirmed—that the regiment would be going to India in the New Year. In which case it was obvious we must be married before he went, and I could either go out with him or join him there later.

I would love India, he assured me. A gay, care-free life, and I would be greatly in demand with my piano-playing at social functions. He advised me to consult my sister Laura about clothes for the tropics, and I was to be sure and spare no expense on

the outlay. If my father's allowance for the trousseau did not run to extravagance, I was to send the bills to him.

I said I was quite sure Papa would not agree to that. Whatever might be necessary for my trousseau would be supplied. He need not be afraid that I would shame him.

He perched me on his knee and told me I was 'touchy.'

"And you are tactless," I retorted, wriggling to free myself from his caresses, to which habitude had now rendered me immune.

"Tactless?" his eyes bulged. "My darling girl, you can't expect me to pick and choose my words in every sentence. And if I'm not allowed to give you good advice——"

"You can give me anything you like but good advice," I said; and said no more lest I should say too much.

For in those first weeks of my engagement and during a succession of almost sleepless nights, I held within myself interminable talks as with some stern inquisitor, whose cold relentless questions extracting furtive answers, hammered through the long black hours till exhaustion and the waking birds announced another day. . . .

Do you know what you are doing? Do you realize? There are women in the streets who sell themselves to men. You know. You've seen. That time—Papa——

Why bring in Papa? I had forgotten.

No. You've not forgotten. He went out and bought a woman. You remember how he looked standing there with the gas-light full on his face. Do you remember his face? And his smile? You thought him foul and horrible. He was. And so are you. . . . And don't get out and light the gas for you won't be able to read. Will you listen? *He* bought. *She* sold.

What has Papa and his woman to do with me? I am to be married. Every one wants this marriage.

Everyone?

Well, of course, Hugh's people don't think me good enough, but I'm not marrying his beastly old father or his mewing cat of a Mamma. I am marrying *him*.

Exactly.

And if it's obvious one *has* to marry surely to God I am doing the best I can for myself? What's called a Good Match. I'll be rich——

Do you care a row of pins about being rich?

I'd hate to be poor. I *must* have all the things I've been used to.

By which you mean a maid to wait on you hand and foot, a carriage to drive in, all the clothes you want and for which you are selling yourself just as those women sell *themselves*. There's no difference between you and——

No! That's a lie! It's not for those things that I'm marrying Hugh.

But you've just said you *want* all those things. How I detest you! A weak, snivelling rat, afraid to stand up to the truth. You won't even face the truth about this tremendous decision. You let Belle choose your husband. Husband! Think what it means to be married. Think of sharing your bed with a man. Think of . . .

How can I think? I've never known——

Have you no imagination? Remember the marriage service 'With my body I thee worship.' Do you worship Hugh with your body?

You make me hot. These are not thoughts one should dwell on.

Why not? Why don't you worship him—that way?

I ought to, I suppose. He's very good-looking.

Do you really think he's good-looking? Do you admire his type? You know he's too pink and too tailored. He is probably pink all over—not muscular but flabby. He'll turn to fat before he's forty. And his face has about as much expression as an egg except when he looks at you and then his eyes swim and swell and he breathes and his mouth opens to draw yours into it—and then his tongue——

Don't be disgusting.

So you find that disgusting. Do you remember, when you were very young, Guy Haddon's niece May saying that being kissed gave you a baby?

Well? What has that childish nonsense got to do with——
Think it over.

I don't want to think it over. I want to go to sleep.

Wait a minute. . . . Why do you suppose he has chosen you instead of someone tall and beautiful and dashing?

I can't imagine. But anyhow—I'm not all that plain. I have lovely eyes and long eyelashes and a good complexion and perfect teeth.

And no height, and no figure. Your figure's as flat as a pancake. But you often find that handsome men will marry plain women so that they—the supreme male—can be the centre of attraction.

You mean that Hugh has chosen me as a foil to himself?

He wouldn't, of course, admit it, but that you may be sure is the reason. And do you realize he hasn't once said he loved you—though he is always asking if you love *him*?

I know. He's damnably conceited.

Why don't you tell him so? It would do him a world of good to hear a few home truths.

I'll wait till we're married for that.

Yes, it's going to be hell for you both. And what about your music? He doesn't know a thing about music. He says Bach is old-fashioned. Dry as dust and academic.

A lot of people think that.

Bach is your soul.

Don't be theatrical. In any case I have never found anyone who understands music except Mike.

And Jonathan.

Why Jonathan—suddenly? And how do you know Jonathan does?

I *do* know. And *you* know. And Charles, too . . . Doesn't he understand music?

Yes. Charles understands everything. . . .

Such nights must have shown in my face for Charles to see.

He had come for a week to Dunmore and we had met again. Hugh brought him over to dine with us at Crowthorpe. He had not altered much. All his life he kept that look of a lion cub, accentuated by his untidy mane of hair and those eyes the colour of dry sherry; eyes that seemed to see so much more than his blunt-cornered lips ever spoke. I remember how after dinner on the first night he came to Crowthorpe, he and I walked in the dusk of the garden, and I showed him the mark on my forehead. He nodded, frowning, and said, "I wish I'd been qualified at that time to treat you. The man who carved you up like that ought to have been shot. I'd have left you with nothing worse than a dimple just above your eyebrow. So we're going to be cousins, Jenny-for-short? Hugh's in luck—as usual."

"I'm in luck, too," I said.

Charles had stepped aside to peer at something in the privet hedge that bordered the spinney; he beckoned me, whispering, "Look." I looked where he pointed but could see nothing.

"There he is—sitting on that leaf. Can't you see him now? A giant of a fellow with his wings wrapped close. If you watch you'll see him unfurl in a minute. Up you get—you lazy devil!"

I saw what looked like an enormous butterfly with folded wings of pale brown and pink crossed by three black bands.

"We call him the *Sphinx ligustri*," Charles explained, "because when he's a caterpillar he sleeps in a position not unlike that of a sphinx." He put out his hand and enclosed the moth within it. "Look at that great head and those prominent eyes, and the short stout antennæ. A beauty, isn't he? I've never caught one napping before. . . . Off with you to your lady-love and take care not to burn your wings."

He released the fluttering thing that soared up and away.

"I expect he will," I remarked, watching that shadowy flight. "He'll fly straight into the first candle-flame he sees."

"Not till he's had his breakfast," Charles said. "Did you see where he went? Come, I'll show you."

I followed him as, cautiously, he trod the grass and stooped to a bed of snapdragons, pointing. "There you are, drinking honey wine for all he's worth. When he's full he'll go a-courting. Steady on, you old toper! You'll be too drunk to enjoy your love. She's waiting for you now, I'll be bound. Large-eyed and clinging to a tree-trunk in that coppice and in a rare state, too. You'd better look sharp if you want to catch her—she won't wait for you. She's a spoiled hussy she is; she can have her choice of half a hundred suitors."

I knelt to watch, entranced.

"See the wide spread of his wings?" continued Charles. "But for all his size and beauty he's a modest fellow. He knows there aren't so many girls about for him. Unlike the human race, the women of his world are in the minority."

"What on earth are you two doing?"

I had not heard Hugh's approach on the grass, and his voice brought me in a guilty scramble to my feet.

"Charles," I said, "is giving me a lesson in natural history."

"And your death of cold into the bargain. Why do you let her kneel on the ground when the dew is falling? Come along in." And taking my arm, Hugh marched me away, leaving Charles still gazing at the moth, and obviously lost in the moment. For him Hugh and I might not, I think, have existed.

"What a crank the fellow is!" muttered Hugh.

I said: "I like his crankiness."

Hugh's fingers tightened on my arm. "Are you trying to make me jealous?"

"I'm not trying," I laughed, "you *are* jealous."

"Yes." He swung me round. "I am. You've no right to go off with Charles like that immediately after dinner. You've been wandering out here alone with him for half an hour. You seem to forget that I have first claim on you. I hope you're not the sort of girl who flirts with every man she meets. But, of course, if you prefer Charles' company to mine, you're welcome to it."

"Hugh!" I stared. With his under lip bulging, his eyes hot and angry, he looked like a peevish boy. "How can you be so absurd. You can't really mean——"

"I mean," he interrupted, "that I won't let you play the fool with me. You understand?"

"No," I said, loud, "I do not understand. I thought you had more sense. Good heavens! Am I not to be allowed to talk to any man but you without——" I stopped. In the gathering twilight, pierced now by a sickle moon, his face had whitened; he seized my wrist and pulled me up to him, saying through his teeth:

"So that's your little game." A roughness tinged his voice that made it sound as though his father spoke. I stayed passive, looking in his eyes.

"Hugh," I said quietly, "let there be no mistake. I am not your thing. You cannot order me—do this—do that. I am myself. I belong *only* to myself."

"You belong to me," he whispered, tense.

"Not yet," I said, and dragging my wrist from his, I went into the house and up to my room.

Dark was creeping slowly down upon the garden. No breeze, no murmur of bird or beast, no rustle of wings stirred the stillness; only the blind silent flight of a bat, and the noise of my own heart beating to the words that echoed through me. 'I belong only to myself . . . to myself. . . .'

Opening the window, I leaned out for air. The new moon, just risen, lay, a thin gold boat at anchor in the sky above a yew tree that stood like a giant sentinel wrapped in a cloak of shadow, as if to guard the bridge of dusk between day and night. Among the blur of pale flowers I could see Charles' white shirt-front, his stooping shoulders, his down-bent head. . . . Then through the quiet I heard Belle's voice, "Doctor Mallett, do come in and make a fourth at whist," and Hugh saying, "I think we ought to be getting back, Mrs Haddon." And Belle calling high for me. I did not move.

There came a mumble of talk, Belle no doubt excusing my

behaviour, and presently the sound of carriage wheels along the drive and Hugh shouting for Charles.

He came, lounging, his hands in his pockets, and halted under my window, looking up. I don't know how he could have seen me there, for I was kneeling on the window-seat half hidden by the curtains, but as though continuing his talk from where it had been broken off, he said: "This is his first night out. He was in his cradle this morning. He is only just feeling his wings." And he went through the french windows into the house. . . .

That trifling quarrel—if quarrel it could be called—between Hugh and myself, was only one of countless others equally unimportant. I am sure that neither of us dreamed that all such repetitions based on a moment's pique, a careless word, left us each a little more disrupted; perhaps I saw more clearly than did he the way that we were drifting towards hidden rocks of unacknowledged mutual hostility. But while Hugh brooded on a tiff and turned it over in his mind until the taste of it grew sour, I was ready to forget. It was not in these capricious moments, too small to be remembered, that our danger lay; indeed, I was the first, I think, to blame myself, to ask forgiveness for my 'bestly' temper and to be chided like as not for the use of that 'ugly' word, considered slang in those days. His egotism and his arrogance were less exasperating than his attempt at domination. I had schooled myself to accept all else but that. "All my life," I remember telling him, "I have submitted to my father's will. He has employed a method of terrorism to make of me a poor weak worm of a thing that would never dare to turn—on him. And yet I think that one day I might even dare that far. I'm growing up. Since I've known you I have grown up so fast I hardly know myself. But this much," I said, "I *do* know—certain sure. That you and I will come to blows if you lay down the law. I won't be driven."

"You're a mulish little darling, aren't you?" was Hugh's reply to that. So I gave up. . . .

It was always so whenever I tried to make him talk, to see with me, to prepare the way that we would tread together. At each advance I made I was flung back. He gave me tacitly to understand that my personality must be moulded to and merged in his. The home threshold was my purdah, he my lord, holding masculine views unapproachable to feminine minds. I don't blame him. Such was his upbringing, such his creed. In that world of male supremacy, incredible to realize in this day of

equal courage, of equal rights to bear the equal burden in this battle for the very soul of man—in that world of the past so remote, yet not more than five decades' distance from this—I remember reading an astonishing book called 'The Girl of the Period,' in which the author declares 'That the most brilliant sallies ought to convey the impression of being struck out of the woman by her partner, rather than to be elaborated by herself alone, else she offends masculine self-love, never slow to take fire. . . .'

I, therefore, who dared brave self-assertion, was a rebel and a traitor to my kind.

* * *

Hugh did not bring Charles over to Crowthorpe again. I did, however, see him once more before he left—the day Hugh went to London to buy my engagement ring. That same afternoon I had gone for a walk in the Crowthorpe woods and met Charles riding along a grassy track. He pulled up and called to me, "I found a gate open down the road. I know I'm trespassing."

"I won't tell on you," I said, keeping my distance from his horse, a prancing bay with a wicked white to his eye, "only don't let your horse come too near me."

He laughed, sitting square in his seat with his eyes full of light and his face full of health, and the sun on his hatless head. "I don't believe," he said, "that you're afraid of horses. You're not afraid of anything, except yourself."

His straight look caught mine and held it till I reddened.

"What makes you think I'm afraid of myself?"

"Aren't we all?" he asked coolly; and stroking the neck of his horse, he added, still staring hard at me, "those bruises under your eyes are a shade deeper and darker than when we last met. They've no right to be there at your age. You're not sleeping."

These doctors! I stammered, "Not very ——" and then blurted what I hadn't meant to say. "I haven't slept for three weeks. I'm walking now to make myself tired in the hope I may sleep to-night. But I can't—somehow—sleep. And if I don't soon I'll go mad." My voice squeaked on a note of hysteria and I felt a storm rising inside me that I must use all my force to keep back, lest I break down before him who saw so much and knew all without telling.

Charles said: "I can give you a pill that will make you sleep like a top, but that won't cure your trouble."

The wood was very still; even the birds were quiet. His horse was quiet, too, soothed by his hand, square and blunt-fingered, laid on that satiny neck: no sound but the rustle of wind in the feathering tree branches and my thin whisper: "I'm in no trouble, thank you, Charles, but I'll be glad to take your pill to make me sleep."

"There comes a waking after sleep," said Charles, "and—then?"

"Another pill."

Our eyes crossed again.

"A bitter pill even when sugar-coated may stick in the throat."

"I'll swallow it."

"If nature works in you, my dear," Charles said, "the way it should, you'll spit it out." Then he leaned from his saddle to give me his hand. "Good-bye, and good luck to you, Jenny. I'll send you a dose to bring you sound sleep and happier dreams. And if ever you want some cousinly advice—now or hereafter—you will find my address in the Medical Directory."

And abruptly he wheeled his horse and rode away without another word or backward glance.

I watched him out of sight and walked on alone through the empty wood hearing the soft thud of the horse's hoofs till they faded and were lost. The way led by a roundabout route to the lodge. I arrived there to find Nurse armed with a pair of shears clipping the privet hedge, and full of a visit from the village doctor who had brought a specialist from London to see Phœbe. "He hasn't been gone half an hour. Doctor Grey told me there'd been a specialist staying over at Dunmore and that he was going to call him in for a consultation. I never dreamed he'd turn out to be the same young feller who looked after you that night you cut your head open jumping downstairs. For that," said Nurse, "is who it was. And I knew him the moment I set eyes on him. Isn't the world small?"

"Very small," I said, "he's Hugh's cousin." And I went into the cottage and sat down by Phœbe's bed. "Did you like Dr Mallett?" I asked her.

A fat chuckle slid over her face. "He's a comic he is! He didn't half make me laugh—the things he says: not—now I come to think of it—that he did say much." And in her eyes came a look of such dark longing that my sight was blurred to see it. "I asked him if I'd ever get back the use of my hands—to do a bit of crochet——"

"He said there's every reason," put in Nurse, "to hope you would. These wasps!" She made a vicious jab with a knife at one buzzing round a jampot on the table, and bade me, "Come and sit down here and have your tea."

"I'm not complainin'," said Phœbe from the bed. "It's only that one gets a bit sick of oneself lying here, 'elpless with nothin' to do. I've never 'ad a day's illness in me life—till this." And again her eyes grew dark and troubled. "Sometimes I feel I'd be glad to be done with meself—give up the ghost and go 'ome."

I swallowed and said: "You don't look much like a ghost, Phœbe dear. I'm afraid you're a bit of a fraud."

She smiled up at me with trembling lips. "And so are you, my lovey."

"Come along now, come along. Your tea's getting cold," said Nurse. "What's in that basket, for goodness' sake?"

"Peaches," I told her, "for Phœbe and you. I wheedled them out of Macpherson."

"What, him? However did you manage it? Never so much as a stone of a peach would he hand out to me if I asked him. He's that mean bein' Scotch."

"I don't think we ought to take them," demurred Phœbe. "What would the master say?"

"You take what you can get and be thankful," said Nurse. "As if the master would grudge you a peach. There's six here. My word! What *can* you have done to Macpherson?"

I turned my back to stare out of the window while Nurse held a peach for Phœbe to eat, and my heart was seething with black rage against life's wanton cruelty. There seemed no sense nor reason in it, for why choose one so simple and so kind as Phœbe to torture in this fashion? . . . And I heard her saying, "That was prime. Thank God for my good tea."

When I left, Nurse walked with me down the narrow path to the gate in the hedge. "So Dr Mallet is your young man's cousin. Fancy that!" And she looked at me hard.

"Yes; I didn't know he was a specialist."

"Dr Grey," said Nurse, "thinks very high of his opinion, I can tell you."

"And what is his opinion? Is there any hope that Phœbe will ever get better?"

Nurse's chins quivered. "No hope at all. I had a word with him in private."

I pulled a leaf from the privet hedge and broke it between my fingers.

"And if such a one as him," Nurse said with startling fierceness, "was your fancy, how my heart would rejoice. But not for that barber's dummy—and that I'll tell you straight."

"And what else?" I asked, eyes down, "did he say about Phœbe?"

"What else could he say? She'll live like this until she dies and she may live to be eighty, God help her."

"God won't help her," I whispered, "sometimes I think God doesn't exist."

"Not for you who dare defy Him," Nurse said in her throat. "And that's sure."

She went from me into the cottage. I ran after her, "Don't——" and tugged at her apron. She turned and took my face between her dry old hands that smelled of carbolic and onions. "My baby," she said, "would never have spoken like that. It would have cut its tongue out sooner. What's come over you—white as a sheet and all of a tremble?"

"It's the 'ot weather," said Phœbe. . . .

At the end of September Hugh returned to his regiment at the Curragh and I to my father's house.

My status there had markedly improved. Papa's attitude towards me was almost kind. It was evident, too, that Selina was greatly relieved at this turn of events since, as she said, it was obvious we could not 'get on' together, and had I remained unmarried the situation would have become intolerable.

To which I heartily agreed.

The preparations for the wedding and the ordering of my trousseau were supervised by Belle, during which time I saw nothing of Hugh, but he wrote to me regularly three times a week and I as regularly wrote to him. Our interchange of letters did not, I think, mean much to either of us; a recounting of daily trivialities—from me no more than that. From him a hasty scrawl that invariably began 'My own little darling' and ended 'your devoted husband-to-be.' The day was finally fixed for the tenth of December.

I had written to Mimi to tell her of my approaching marriage but received no answer. She was once more in the throes of rehearsal. From Mike I heard of her latest success as *prima ballerina* at the Paris Opera. He and Mitzi went over for the first night of the production and Mitzi stayed there for a while. Mike was alone in the house at the back still giving music lessons, but now no more to me.

"So you've chosen," Mike said, "the easiest way. I don't blame ye. . . ." How well I remember that last talk we had in the room overlooking the garden. It was a wild autumn day in late October. There had been a gale in the night to strip the trees of their golden warmth. Only a few last leaves clung defiant to the bare sooty branches stretched dark against a cloud-tossed sky; then these too loosed their hold and fluttered down with a dry crackling sound. Mike stood at the window watching. "The wind," he said, "is laughing on the wrong side of her mouth—the unholy witch she is, with her long streaming white hair. Can you see her now riding high heaven where surely to God she has no right to be? . . . No." He turned from the window to me where I sat motionless at the piano. "I don't blame ye. It's not for me to guess what ye hide, even though I feel I've some right to speak to you as if you were me own. Part of you *is* me own"—he lifted my fingers one by one as they rested on the keys. "I have made these what they are. I could have made them more than what they are if you had rendered all you had to give. Perhaps you've kept a portion of yourself in reserve for something of more value still than music. There's hidden depths in you unfathomed—that may yet be touched, but not, I think, by him to whom you go as slow and as unwillin' as the girl in the tale who cried when the day would be coming and ran out and hid in a thorn-bush. Do you remember the tale I mean?"

"Yes, Mike." And I bowed my head not to see the look in his eyes that accused me to my soul. "She was fetched," I said, "by a man in green. There's no man in green for me."

"How do you know," asked Mike, "that there is not?" And when I made no answer, "You'll not forget all I've taught you?"

I twisted the diamond half-hoop on my finger; through the mist of my held tears the stones swelled and brightened to dazzle and burn white-hot in a flame to my cheeks. I dragged the ring off and laid it aside and dashed recklessly into Mendelssohn's Wedding March, thumping it out as loud as I could, brazen and ugly to hear, till Mike crashed his hand over mine and the notes screeched their pain and were silent.

"That's something," Mike said. "I've *not* taught ye."

I stood and put the ring back on my finger. "Mike, I want you to know that nothing and no one can take away what you've taught me, whatever I do or wherever I am . . . for as long as I live. . . ." And I kissed him and went from him blindly.

Then in the midst of the trousseau buying and visits to Madame

Clarice for the all-important choosing of the bridal dress; amid the fuss of invitations to be printed, and the list of guests whose company would or would not be requested, came a startling impediment.

Grandpapa was of a sudden taken ill.

The doctor had said he must guard against colds, but he hadn't sufficiently guarded. A walk—unusual for him who so seldom went out—a stroll on the grass in Kensington Gardens one mild day in November, tempted no doubt by a straggling sun or who knows what restless rebellion against the shadow lurking at his side: who could tell, save he himself who never would, what took him out that morning in a light-weight overcoat, accustomed as he was to one fur-lined? To sit—so he told the tale with a sly grin in the doctor's long face—for half an hour by the Serpentine watching the ducks and listening to the pigeons in a kind of daze from which he was aroused to pay a penny for his chair and be taken with the shivers. And that night he started a 'damned infernal tickling' in his throat.

He slept badly, woke unrefreshed and rang for his breakfast in bed.

"I've been coughin' all night," he told Bateman. "My chest feels as raw as a bone."

And he looked, so Bateman afterwards to me recounted, like a bone, white and dry. Very bony indeed. Not himself at all, and in a twitter so to speak. "And blew me head off when I asked him should I go and fetch the doctor. 'Doctor, be somethin'——', if you'll excuse me, miss. The master, God bless him, was always free with his language, 'I'm not havin' any doctors. Bring me a hot toddy.' So I took him up a glass of rum and lemon, and Cook done him a sole for his lunch. He ate it all and asked for a slice of Stilton and a bottle of the '75 port. His appetite was wonderful. We thought it couldn't be nothing worse than a slight cold. . . ."

That flew to the lungs and gnawed away the last of his strength, held so tenaciously and with such defiance against the inexorable swift assault of nature come at last to claim its due. But it was not to be so easy. The sturdy spirit that controlled him put up a gallant fight. Game to the end 'Old Nick' flummoxed the doctors called in by command of Papa. For five days and five nights he lay there holding on to himself, scarcely speaking: only his eyes spoke for him, noticing all that was done, impatient and angry, as though they demanded why *he* should be brought to this

pass? He who had never been troubled with the ills of old age—other than gout and his ears—that had become just a bit hard of hearing, but not so deaf that he couldn't hear more than was said in plain words.

They had brought in a nurse. What did he want with a nurse? Waste of money . . . whispering and rustling in her starch, doing private things for him—not nice at all. He had shown some temper when she first came in and rounded on the doctor—"What the devil——" to work himself into a fever.

Unable to bear the suspense of waiting at home for such bulletins as Papa would allow me, I called at the house where he lay. Bateman's narrow face as he opened the door to me looked narrower and pinched. To my unspoken question he answered with a shake of his head: "Sinking, miss, I fear."

Aunt Rosie was telling fortunes in the library. Tears rolled unheeded down her cheeks and splashed on her fat ringed hands. She snuffled. "It don't come out right. I don't understand it at all. I have a feeling he's going to die, but I can't find a death in the cards. I shall have to . . . there's the ten of spades. That's illness but not death."

"Won't you tell my cards, Aunt Rosie?"

"No." Aunt Rosie got up with a jingling of bangles and put her hand to her wig. "My head's bad. I forgot to take my salts this morning." She wandered to Grandpapa's chair in the window. "See the mark his head's made on the leather? He wouldn't have an antimacassar. He said the crochet rubbed his bald patch." She went on talking in a murmur to herself. "I'll be an orphan. What'll I do? What'll become of me now? Where will I live? This house'll be too big for me alone. He's all I've got and now he's gone. I hope to the Lord Jesus Christ I may go too."

I went to her and put an arm round her shoulders. "He's not gone yet, dear. While there's life there's hope."

She turned, brushing the tears from her cheeks; her glance slid round emptily and came back to me. "They always say that when hope's gone. Nicholas will have me put away now, you see if he don't. I won't be put away. He shan't put me away. I'll stay here——"

She sat down in Grandpapa's chair and, lifting her hands to her face, wept silently, rocking herself to and fro.

I crept out of the room and up the stairs, halting at Grandpapa's door.

It opened. The white-capped nurse came out carrying some-

thing covered in a towel. Seeing me there she smiled, her cheerful professional smile. "Good morning. A lovely morning, isn't it, for November? But I'm afraid this mild weather will bring fog."

"How is he?" I asked her, dry-mouthed.

"Not too bad at all—if you'll just excuse me——"

She rustled across the landing. I heard the plug being pulled. She returned, the smile still on her face. I slipped between her and the door, intercepting her entrance. "Please tell me the truth, is he going to die?"

The automatic smile vanished; her face became a blank. "He is, of course, a great age."

"Yes, but he's never been old. The doctor said he had a wonderful constitution."

"That is so. He's doing as well as can be expected."

"It's pneumonia, isn't it? Have you ever known anyone as old in years as he who recovered from pneumonia?"

"Oh, yes. I nursed an old lady of eighty-five last summer with double pneumonia, and we pulled her through."

"Can I go in and see him?"

"Yes, I think you might. Just wait one moment."

She passed into the room. I heard her moving about and the sound of a cough—like no cough ever heard—low, hollow, muffled, and a silence. . . . Then the nurse's voice again, brightly; "That's better." And a growling mumble from Grandpapa. "What? Who's better? I've a pain in me side."

The nurse came to the door and beckoned me in.

"You may stay just five minutes—no more."

Very still, very frail, his lean wisp of a body supported by pillows, he seemed not to lie but to sit in a curious waxen tranquillity, stirred only by his harsh laboured breathing and the incessant stealthy movement of his fingers outspread on the sheet. His eyes were closed; he opened them with a faint gleam of recognition as I approached the bed. "Yes, Grandpapa"—I went close and bent over him—"I've come to see how you are."

"Not—too—good." The words came from him painfully but clear. "That damned—woman——"

"Yes, darling, I know. But she's taking great care of you, so that you'll be better very soon."

Our eyes met; in his lay a spark of something young, with a flicker of mischief in it.

"You—think?"

"Of course. You're much better already." I covered his hand with my own.

"You're warm," he said. "I'm cold—and I'll be—colder."

I slid to my knees beside him, and a tear that I could not hold back dropped on his hand. He made an effort to raise that hand and lay it on my head. "Don't cry. What you—cryin' for? You're goin' to be—married, ain't ye?"

"Yes, Grandpapa."

"I've not seen him."

"No."

"I never shall."

"You will. . . . You will."

I felt that tremulous touch on my bowed forehead.

"I think—you aren't——"

The door opened; the nurse appeared to say briskly, "Time's up."

"Go away!" said Grandpapa, "I'm talkin'."

"You mustn't talk."

A strangled chuckle arose in his throat. "I'm not dead yet. Listen, my darlin'—I know what—I know. And remember what I say to you. Don't be afraid to show—a clean—pair o' heels—if you find—the stable-door—unlocked."

"He's wandering," said the nurse, "he does, off and on. You'd better go, Miss Drew."

Over Grandpapa's face passed a look of anger. His silvery whiskers quivered to a faint jerk of impatience that almost lifted his head from the pillow; then it fell back and the desperate fight for breath began again.

I rose from my knees and stooped to kiss his forehead. His eyes gazed into mine as though sending a message; his lips, to which a slight blue tinge had come, writhed to the words, "Remember . . . and never . . . regret."

"Yes, Grandpapa," I whispered, "I'll remember."

A queer sound like a sigh came from him, his eyelids sank and rested. The nurse hurried me out of the room and shut the door.

He died in the dawn of the following day, 'Old Nick' who had always been young.

VIII

I THINK it was Selina who first suggested that the wedding would have to be postponed. Belle, who had been summoned by telegram from Crowthorpe, was inclined to disagree. She and Selina engaged in a lively discussion at dinner the night after Grand-papa died, Belle declaring that it would be idiotic to cancel all the arrangements at this eleventh hour. Far better go on with it, but dispense with the breakfast, and instead of the invitations already printed send out simple black-edged cards announcing the date of the wedding, and word them 'Owing to our recent bereavement there would be no reception but all friends would be welcome at the church.' That at least would bring *some* presents; it would be too bad to lose the lot. Jenny could, of course, wear her wedding dress and Selina and herself could appear in half-mourning for the occasion, something grey or mauve. How fortunate for Laura that she was out of England. Mourning was so shockingly expensive. Luckily for her she had bought enough black for Pa Haddon to last her for years. She would not have to buy any more.

Selina said it was all very well for Belle who was as thin as a rake to wear grey or mauve. Speaking for herself she looked frightful in grey or mauve, and anyhow she thought it would seem very callous not to wait at least till after Christmas, when Jenny could have a full wedding and everybody could waive a point for that once and wear what they liked.

Papa said he agreed with Selina. There was such a thing as Good Taste. It would in his opinion be the worst of Bad Taste to go flaunting about at a wedding immediately after his Poor Father's funeral, dressed in all colours of the rainbow. Yes, yes—grey or mauve—and were not grey or mauve colours, or did Belle suggest that he was colour-blind? And surely Jenny could be induced to set aside her own personal inclination in this matter and realize there were others in the world beside

herself to be considered—or was she utterly devoid of all sentiment? He, of course, was not consulted. Oh, no. As the mere Head of the Family and the one member of it to whom this lamentable loss meant anything at all—he supposed he was entitled to air his own views. And his own views were that the wedding would *have* to be postponed. Willy-nilly. Not so much for the sake of appearances but out of respect for the Dead. He himself, he said, would write to Hugh, who, he had no doubt, would see eye to eye with him in this.

He may have been unduly optimistic.

Although Hugh returned a non-committal reply, stating that he quite understood how this great sorrow would necessitate a reconstruction of arrangements, his four-page letter to me—the longest I had ever received from him—expressed nothing but profoundest disapproval of: ‘this determination to upset all our plans with no thought of me—or of you.’ He had arranged for three weeks’ marriage leave and had booked a suite of rooms at an hotel in Paris to say nothing of the tickets to Monte Carlo bought in advance. He had been keeping that back as a surprise for me, and now, owing to this most unfortunate occurrence, he supposed the tickets would have to be wasted. He told me frankly that he thought my father was being unnecessarily exacting about the whole thing. Surely the living mattered more than the dead? He had never heard of anything so mad in all his life as this idea of postponing the wedding just because of the death of an octogenarian grandparent who must have had one foot in the grave for years. And as soon as the funeral was over, which he regretted he could not possibly attend (and would I be a darling and order a wreath in his name to the tune of five guineas, cheque herewith enclosed), he would not hesitate to tell my worthy father and in no mean terms what he thought of him for not having consulted the chief person concerned, i.e. himself, in this matter. . . .

I put the letter on the fire and took the cheque to Belle, asking her to deal with it as requested.

And when all was over and all that I had known of Grand-papa had with grisly pomp been removed from the house on the Bayswater Road; when those obscure male relatives, who were seen only upon such occasions, had returned with Papa and Guy Haddon to drink port and sherry and discuss in suitably hushed voices the monetary value of him to whose remains they had paid homage—‘worth anything between eighty and a hundred

thousand they wouldn't mind betting'; and when after having reiterated their heartfelt condolence and pressed everyone's hand and murmured 'May God give you strength'—and 'Time is the Great Healer,' these mourners departed, leaving only the immediate family drearily seated round the dining-room table, Papa announced it was his painful duty now to read the Will.

Impressively he stood, his back to the window, unfurling the document, clearing his throat. The emphatic blackness of his clothes seemed to exaggerate his height and detract from the triviality of mere feminine crape. Aunt Rosie, who sat beside me dabbing her face with a black-bordered handkerchief damp with lavender-water and tears, put out her hand to clutch mine.

"Tell him he's not to. I don't want to know——"

"It's all right, Aunt Rosie, you needn't. Would you like me to take you to your room?"

Papa stared stonily at this interruption. "What is it?"

"Can Aunt Rosie and I be excused, Papa?"

"No, you may not."

Aunt Rosie stood up. "I don't care, I'm goin'. I've had enough. I won't hear the will." Her glance strayed round the table from one to the other: Guy helping himself to a third glass of sherry: Selina counting the pile of unopened letters that had come by the afternoon post and marking with a pencil the number to date on the back of an empty envelope: Belle who cast up her eyes in appeal; and Papa who adjusted his monocle, frowning. "You said?"

"I won't hear the will," Aunt Rosie declared, "let him rest. It's disgustin'. Not cold in his grave and you itchin' to get at his money already. Disgustin'."

Papa strode to the bell and pulled it with such violence that the tassel came off in his hand.

"It always was loose," said Aunt Rosie. "I tell you I'm going."

Guy set down his glass and leaned forward. "Come, come, Aunt. Mustn't give way. Be brave. Just a mere formality you know."

"Formality," Aunt Rosie snorted, "be damned!"

Guy hurriedly drew back. Papa thundered, "Rosie!"

She nodded. "I said damned and I'll say it again. You'd drag the earth off his coffin and dig up his bones to go grubbin' after his money before he's turned cold in his grave. Money—that's all you think of. Money. Not you." She tightened her hand on mine. "I don't mean you—nor Laura. She's not here anyway so she don't count. But the rest of you—this!"

And she spat.

A perceptible shudder swept through the room. Papa paled.

"The shock," he uttered awfully, "has been too much for her poor remaining wits. Take her away. *Take her away!*" The door opened and Bateman appeared. "Send Bartlett for Miss Drew at once. And fetch the doctor."

"Oh, no, you don't," said Aunt Rosie. "You don't take me away—nor put me away either. *I'm* not dotty. It's you who are dotty."

"Hush, dear," I whispered, "you'll come with me, won't you?"

"Yes," said Aunt Rosie, nodding, "with you. We'll go and have tea. I'd like a boiled egg. One must eat."

Having handed her over to Bartlett, I put on my hat and coat and went out. I, too, had had enough.

Crossing the Bayswater Road I entered the Park and turned towards Kensington Gardens. The sun, red as a holly berry seen through blue scarves of mist, was sinking behind the trees that still held a glint of autumn gold. On the air rose the warm bitter smell of wood-smoke, as sure a herald of winter as the frail scent of snowdrops speak of spring. Far off, muted by the muffled roar of London in the grey quiet of the fading day, came the thin thread-like echo of children's voices, and following the sound I traversed the grassy spaces that led to the Round Pond. There on a seat I sat and watched the dwarf armada of toy boats, and an old white-bearded man in knickerbockers sailing his model yacht with a clamorous group of urchins at his heels.

The slates of Kensington Palace shone as though newly washed in blood, so fierce the sun's cremation. Strange to think that Grandpapa was a young man when the Queen had been a baby in that house; so long a life but never too long for him. And I thought again of those hidden words he spoke to me before he drifted to the borderline of his last sleep. What had he been trying to tell me? What wise unuttered counsel or—what warning?

And wrapped in my thought of him, so close that almost I could sense his presence there beside me, his shrewd young-old eyes with that ghost of a twinkle, gazing out across the gleaming water towards what vision of the future or the past only he could know, I heard my name called . . . "Jennifer Drew. . . ." Did I hear that? Was it a voice, or a shadow across my path that stirred me?

I started, torn from my dream, half-dazed, and thinking that perhaps I dreamed again.

He stood between the water and the children at their play, with the setting sun behind him against the darkening green.

So it had come, this second meeting, as I had always known it must.

What did we tell each other, sitting there while the sun sank lower and the chill dusk gathered around us and the children drifted away? . . .

He had waited, he told me, each afternoon for a week, two weeks, thinking always I would come. "And though you never did I felt somehow that I could go on hoping."

"I heard of you," I said, "from Mimi." And watched his face for a sign.

He nodded: I, too. I got your name and address from her. Where is she now?" And he added carelessly, "I've not seen her for months."

My hands were tightly clasped inside my sealskin muff. "Don't you know?" I whispered. "Surely you must know. I thought ——"

"Well, what did you think? Tell me."

"I thought that you and she——" how stupidly I stammered it, "might be—perhaps—engaged."

He turned, a smile breaking through his wide stare of astonishment.

"I—and Mimi? Engaged? Good God! . . ." He laughed silently as though sharing a joke with himself. "But that's fantastic. You didn't really think I . . . engaged! What a melancholy word—engaged. How would the dictionary give it? 'To bind by contract or promise, to hire or bespeak.' And you thought I was bespoke to Mimi?"

"Yes."

"So that accounts for it," he said. And said no more.

For some seconds I sat, defenceless, drowned in this flood, of revelation: then stunned sense revived to snatch at hope to sink again, shame-covered for my folly, for my blind unutterable folly that had translated one meaning only into my tradition of what was and what should be. For what authority except my own false reason had linked these two together? Mike. . . . Yes, but could Mike be reckoned with for any staple fact beyond his pride of her? Or perhaps there *had* been something . . . that passing phase of which Belle had spoken as 'infection.' 'Calfish.' No, there was nothing of the calf in Jonathan. . . . How could I have so much misunderstood?

Again the surging tide within me sank. If this were true and

Jonathan were free and *disengaged* (for all he loathed the word), then, where was I? My case must stay unaltered. I was bound. True, I had been granted some weeks' grace. . . . Grandpapa! Is this then what you meant? What you with your all-wisdom may have seen? 'Show a clean pair of heels. . . .' Escape. If Grandpapa could stand beside me now would he have told me 'Go with him you love.' . . . ? Yes. There had never been a moment's doubt from my first sight of him that I was . . . given.

Hands folded in my muff, eyes closed, I watched myself. And it was as if I were upheld and led although there was none visible to urge me on, but my heart contained the whisper of a message urgently compelling, fiercely sweet; Yet no voice spoke.

How long I sat lost in this magic there is no knowing, until I heard him say: "How curiously you smile to and at yourself. What do you see behind your eyes? You have a strange secretive little face, tight-shut. And why—" he touched my mourning black, "do you wear these dreadful clothes?"

I told him why: he listened quietly.

"I can never understand," he said, "how people can have this peculiar fear of death and make of it such a thing—such ugliness and woe. Death is as beautiful as birth and as natural."

"Surely," I protested, "only natural to the old?"

"Not at all. To the young, death is a privilege and a beginning. 'Whom the gods love——' "

"Do you think," I asked him breathlessly, "that death is a beginning? I wonder so often about the afterwards, what happens—where we go, what form we take—or if we are still conscious of this other world we've left?"

He smiled. "Do you suppose that we forget? The body dies, but memory is deathless, for memory is the living core of time. And time is what we make it here in life. Who can tell time? Man has marked it by the passage of the sun, by the flight of days and nights in earth's rotation: man takes his time from what he knows of this one infinitesimal speck of dust he calls the earth— and what a gross conceit that is of man who dares to check the movement of the universe! So that I see it this way"

he seemed now to be talking more to himself than to me in that slow voice of his that lingered on a word as though to weigh it, "when we die, or rather when we leave this moment of our lives, we pass into another sphere of time in which the past and present meet the future—are interwoven—making a full circle. Various 'occult' teachings and popular beliefs have touched on

this idea of what they call the 'soul's' eternal journey, but their theories are entirely too vague. Science only can explain a mystery, and no scientist has to our knowledge yet arrived who can give a satisfactory solution of what I feel to be a simple thing, like all seemingly miraculous discoveries, Steam. Electricity. Perhaps some day a giant will arise to lift the curtain of experimental hocus-pocus, and reveal the secret of the further life. Not *another* life. There is no change, but there is—there *must* be continuity. I have often been tempted to find out. Once——” he paused, “once I very nearly did. Look.” He pulled up his cuff to show me the inside of his wrist deep scarred as though it had been hacked with a knife. “I did that deliberately in a moment of——” His glance slipped past me and away, “in a moment best forgotten. I wanted to know the truth of all things hidden. I couldn’t do it in cold blood, of course. The Romans used to cut a vein and bleed to death. That, I think, must be the most exquisite of all ends. . . .”

And a coldness came upon me as I listened. How queerly he had spoken: yet when I raised my eyes and saw his, not shadowed now but startlingly blue and warm and searching into mine, my fear was stifled and I knew that for all our talk of death we were in life together, glad with the excess of it, drawing from each some surer knowledge than the secret of the universe unsolved. . . .

* * *

Looking through my diary the other day, I find the entries at this juncture are chaotic. One name alone predominates, by one thought was I possessed. This love between us was no gradual dawning. It had come to him as to myself with the same poignant certainty that we belonged one to the other, sealed, hand-fast.

Our stolen meetings in those gardens recur in misted harmonies of moments immemorial, lost in the deeps and shades of happiness, or resurrected in swift breath-taking pangs of youth mysteriously awakened; the sweet surprise of touch and words unuttered; sense wrapped in the warm intoxication of discovery to drug all reason, judgment, duty.

We contrived to meet each day. I had enough excuses ready for my absence: appointments with the dressmaker, visits to the shops. I knew no conscience. The days and hours revolved in an unquenched spring of crystalline new life, defying resolution, pledge or promise. Time and Hugh Titterton had ceased to be.

Weather was no deterrent. How often we have wandered in those gardens under the dripping trees unheedful of the rain-soaked grass; or wonder-charged and islanded in sheltering fog, eyes smarting, faces blurred in a cloud-world between the earth and sky. What did we tell each other there that has not been said before and ever since the first man spoke to woman in the first garden of all? Although to us each word we spoke was a fresh marvel: and his indeed for me so big with wisdom that I thought I spoke with God.

His first novel, 'The Return,' had just been published. He gave me a copy with his name inscribed and the date of our meeting. I read it in a night. It was my first encounter with the Irish Literary Movement, but I knew enough to recognize that same Celtic dreaming as in Mike O'Connor's music, translated now in terms of the human spirit on its endless quest. A beautiful rare book, that first of his, coloured by myth and folk-lore, perhaps a shade self-consciously unyouthful, but relieved always by that one strong thread of whimsical salt humour glimmering through his luxuriant choice of words, subtly to weave his quaint conceits of fancy into fact.

There was nothing in this, his book, to give to me who sought him in the personal 'I' of its chief character, any inkling of the secret struggle in his life. I had no pricking of thumbs, no premonitory warning of depths concealed. And if I had known, it would have made no difference. If I were given back the years to choose again, I would have chosen . . .

We had met—I have lost count how many times—before he realized or I remembered that I wore Hugh's ring as token of my bond. We had found a tea-shop in Queen's Road and had come there out of the rain. I had taken off my gloves to pour the tea and sat in a golden trance of rapture while the tea cooled and all heaven sang this miracle of love still unconfessed, until I heard him saying quietly: "What ring is that you wear?"

And the gold feeling passed and ice pierced through to freeze me, in a silence that shrieked aloud.

The waitress plumped a dish of cakes between us on the table. The minutes slid away on leaden feet. I heard him laugh, a harsh grating sound. "I must have guessed." His voice had an edge like a knife. "So that is why you coupled me with Mimi . . . *qui s'excuse*. That is a symbol, isn't it—that vulgar twinkling thing? A diamond half-hoop—properly in order—to be replaced by a gold band. I am not so much out of the world that I don't know

why you wear diamonds on that third finger. Are you to be married? Are you what is called . . . engaged?"

He gave such venom to the word that I have never since been able to repeat it without shame. And for misery I had no answer, "Tell me . . . *tell me!*" The steel in his voice rasped to a shout.

Tea-drinking ladies turned, cups poised, shocked eyebrows lifted. I had no eyes for them; mine were on his that had darkened till they seemed to be all pupils in which I saw myself reflected, very small and dwindling . . . to die. And the rage that shook him greyed his face till it looked old, whitening the knuckles of his hands that gripped the table.

"I was," I whispered, "going to be . . . but I'm not now. I won't. I swear it. Oh, please, no!" For he had risen with that in his look to make me feel unclean.

"I wish you," he said, clear and smiling, "much joy." And without his coat, and hatless, he rushed from the shop as though he had the devil at his heels.

Well!

I sat unstirring, crushed: then from cataleptic vacancy thought and sight returned in simultaneous coherence. I must follow him.

Unconscious of the whispers and rustlings around me, I beckoned the staring waitress, took my purse and the only coin that it contained, a half-sovereign. "That's for the tea, never mind the change——" and I was out and after him into the streaming dusk.

On the greasy pavement I stood uncertain. Which way could he have gone? Vague figures hurried by; umbrellas glistened. The lamp-lighter passed, a wizard shape in the thickening dusk, and under his wand one by one the lights sprang into blossom. Scarcely knowing where I was or what I did, impelled only by the awful certainty that if I lost Jonathan now I must lose him for ever, I gathered my skirts and ran.

The rain, more blinding for the risen wind, lashed at my face; my hat wobbled absurdly, hairpins loosened and fell, my eyes strained for any shape that might be his. My hat was lifted by a gust that tore it from its hatpins and I clutched it, swearing shamelessly as Mike himself might swear, with my wet skirts flapping round my feet, and tears and raindrops and mud-splashes in my mouth—until by the light of a street lamp I sighted a tall figure striding on ahead, and knew him for his shining wind-swept hair.

I tried to call his name, but my voice was a screaming whisper and my heart in my ribs to kill me with this running, and the tearing pain of a stitch in my side.

Then, not ten yards' distance from me, he swerved suddenly and darted through a doorway. And with my breath coming in sobs to my throat I ran harder, to halt where he had vanished.

At first the gas-lit front, the gilded sign above, the casks and bottles ranged below, gave me nothing; then an old hag in a shawl came out of a door, wiping her mouth, and a collarless man with a cap over one eye lurched in. And I knew. . . . I had seen it many times before but until this moment never very clearly, or seeing, did not choose to recognize it as a public-house. The unwritten law by which environment had chained me, forbade all knowledge of gin-palaces and such. But now, all laws defied, I stood up-gazing at this brazen hussy of a house; a buxom drab of houses, welcoming men and women to her charms flauntingly displayed in white letters like a grin upon a face. Saloon Bar. Private Bar. Billiards.

: And he was there in that place whose beery stench was the breath of the gutter, in there—shoulder to shoulder standing herded with those others, as every time one passed in or out of the swing door, I caught a glimpse of him reflected among the shelves of bottles in a mirror.

It did not shock me that he should fortify himself with brandy, whisky or whatever: it was as much a gentlemanly privilege to drink wine or spirits as to smoke cigars or cigarettes; but that he should choose to seek refreshment in a public-house—was startling to say the least: and the least said excused him in my thankfulness that he was found. Not lost, not gone for ever, but here, for my sight to intercept his exit when he came. Though he was long in coming; and I ashamed to stand outside those doors, even though the darkness hid me from all recognition: afraid, too, lest a policeman were to come and move me on. That would be unutterable disgrace. I must stand just there in front of that quite respectable hairdresser's shop close by, where waxen beauties simpered from under towers of yellow curls or ebony plaits. One, in azure satin, her shoulders paler than the dirty grey-white rose that adorned her Titian waves, revolved on a pedestal to offer from all angles the perfection of her chignon. With one eye on her and the other determinedly upon that lighted doorway, I waited.

A quarter of an hour must have passed while I stood there

in the pouring rain, drenched and shivering, though not with cold. It seemed more like fifteen years than fifteen minutes before he came out.

"Jonathan!" It was the first time I had called him by his name. He turned sharply and stayed rooted. I ran to him. "Wait. Listen. Let me explain." The gas-light caught his face. He smiled with a dragging of his lower lip that was no smile at all. "Don't look like that," I whispered.

"How do I look?" One corner of his smile twisted up.

"Frightening . . . why did you go in there?"

"In where?"

"Into that horrid place. I followed you."

"Followed me? Why?"

"You know why. I didn't want you to think . . . I couldn't let you go and leave me. That ring . . . it doesn't mean anything now. It never did. Do you believe me? Frenziedly I shook his arm. "You must! Oh, let us go somewhere and talk. We can't talk here."

"You're wet," he said, stroking my face with his finger.

"Yes. It doesn't matter. Oh, do let's come away from here."

He passed his hand across his eyes that stared vacant, into mine, as though he saw not me, but some inward fogginess. Then suddenly he dropped his arm to slide it round my shoulders, holding me close to him there in the street, with the traffic splashing mud, and people dodging to avoid us under their umbrellas where we stood together, locked.

"What is all this about?" he asked in whispers. "That ring? God, yes, the ring. Tell me. You wouldn't tell me . . . and I thought we loved. Let it be love between us, Jennifer. . . . Let me love you. Always."

The rain chuckled in the gutters, the lamplights wavered, flared, like blazing huge chrysanthemums above the darkened street; and higher than the grey mass of roof-tops under the black river of the sky, where blown cloud wisps scurried, one winking star peered out. On my upturned face I felt a wetness, not of rain. . . . This was my moment. For this then I had lived, had suffered without rule or purpose in a world of shiftless unrealities, and died my little deaths . . . and been reborn.

I found my fingers twining into his. "Come away," I breathed, "and tell me that again. Keep saying it. I can't hear it said enough. Look! That cab. . . ."

I signalled a four-wheeler crawling past. Jonathan fumbled with the door-handle, muttering: "The damn thing's stuck."

"Pull it, sir, pull it," growled the cabman, "it's the damp."

The door flew open; I got in. He followed.

"Where shall we go?" I asked him, panting.

"To Hell for all I care."

"Don't," I whispered. "Everything is going to be different now, I promise you. Tell him where to go."

He turned his head slowly to look at me. "Where do you want to go?"

I beat my hands together. "Anywhere! Why are you so strange? I thought we were going to be so happy now." My voice trailed emptily away.

He laughed, that grating laugh again, and thrust his head out of the window. "Go on—Hampstead Heath." And leaning back he folded his arms across his chest and closed his eyes.

The cab jerked and jolted on its way. It smelled of straw and leather and horse-dung. He sat beside me dimly, his face a blur, the whiteness of his collar scarcely whiter. I could no longer endure this aching silence, the close damp heat, the smell.

I drew a deep breath.

"I want to explain. I was . . . I suppose I still am in a way until I break it . . . promised. That's to say . . . the word you hate. Engaged. It means nothing now, you understand? It never did. I was forced into this by circumstances. It was a question of . . ."

"I am not interested," he said, "in your engagement." And his tone, cool, indifferent, with a yawn in it, lit a fire in my cheeks, to lash at him:

"Don't lie! And don't pretend. I know. I heard what you said to me out there in the street, and I believed what you said. I've been praying to hear you say it."

"Say? What did I say?"

I was in great trouble now—past all belief, past bearing. If it were his pleasure to torment me, let him have his fill. I could stop my ears, or hold my tongue . . . or kill myself. But I think that I was nearer killing him.

"If you didn't mean what you said, you can tell the cabman to drive me home, and get out of here and leave me. I realize what you must think. The fool—the fool I am! Running after you and waiting for you while you went inside that awful place. But what a thing to do! What on earth possessed you——?"

He seemed to come alive at that and turned to take my chin in his hand and drag my face to his. I smelled his breath, strong of the stuff he had swallowed, but I took no account of it. Hugh often smelled of wine and always of tobacco. To me there was no difference; both were male smells and therefore pardonable.

"I haven't touched or tasted drink for over a year, when I swore by all that's Holy I never would again. I loathe the stuff. I loathe the taste of it and the sight of it. But if I can't have you I'll be drowned in it and damned in it, so now you . . ."

All this he said with his mouth an inch from mine and the brogue in his voice, rich and full; then his words suddenly ceased and his lips searched, to find and take with a sweet madness, warmer, closer, deeper, till sense perished and I weakened, and lay still. . . . And presently I heard his voice again.

"Jennifer . . . your name so part of you . . . you're going to be mine now. Utterly and for always. That much I have known since the first second that I saw you in this life. Beyond that I know nothing. Or why the gods have flung me in your way, for I've no good to give you more than the best of me and that's not worth the taking. All the same I have a feeling that we're bound together, you and I, by some invisible cord . . . and if we are torn apart and that cord breaks, one or both of us will go on bleeding for the other through eternity. That's how it is with me, my lovely dear."

I stirred in his arms.

"With me, too," I whispered.

He lifted my hand, turning it to bury small slow kisses in its palm. Then: "You will take," he said, "this ring off from your finger and give it back where it belongs, which is not here. We don't need—do we?—rings and things for promise. I don't care who he is or what it means. For me it has no meaning. Take it off."

I took it off and put it in my purse.

"And now," he crushed my hand against his mouth, "this is mine entirely. All of you is mine. For ever."

And in that timeless moment while sense and spirit fused, and our universe, that dingy cab, rolled and rattled us to starriest heights far beyond Hampstead's, or beyond earth and heaven, a sudden jarring interruption brought our world about our ears. "Ere y'are, sir," said the cabman, "'Ampstead 'Eath."

I was late for dinner. "Just in time," Papa observed, with ominous affability, "for the dessert. Sit down."

I sat, apologetic. He cut me short. "There is no possible excuse. I understand that you did not visit the dressmaker this afternoon. You did not *go* to the dressmaker this afternoon, for she sent a message to that effect inquiring why you have not been for—how many appointments missed, I do not know. What exactly was the message sent, my dear?"

Selina, in careful negotiation with a peach, avoided my eyes.

"Madame Clarice wrote a note awaiting a reply addressed to you. It was marked 'Urgent,' so I opened it. I have it here." She produced from her pocket the note, and passed it across to me.

Papa put up his monocle. "Read it aloud," he commanded. I read:

"DEAR MADAM,

Having received from you no orders for the cancellation of two appointments last week and one to-day for the fitting of your wedding dress, we fear there must have been some misunderstanding, and beg to inform you that the gown is ready to be fitted pending your convenience without which the work cannot proceed. We enclose herewith a fresh appointment card and await your esteemed instructions.

With apologies for troubling you, and assuring you of our best attention at all times——"

"Well?" Papa interrupted, "what have you to say? Why were you not at the dressmaker's? I understand—or more correctly—your stepmother understands that the carriage took you to Bond Street and deposited you at the dressmaker's door at three p.m. this afternoon, and that you told Foster not to wait. You would walk home. Is this so?"

"Yes, Papa."

"And did you walk home?" asked Papa, showing his teeth.

"Some of the way. I——"

No . . . no more lies. I smiled straight into his monocle. "I will tell you everything, Papa, when I have had my dinner."

"Oho! Your dinner. Is this an hotel? Do you suppose the servants have nothing else to do but serve half a dozen dinners?"

"These peaches," said Selina, "are delicious. Belle sent them from Crowthorpe to-day."

I looked at her, wondering why she should have been at such pains to promote this discussion with Papa. Had she not mentioned

that note from Clarice he would have been none the wiser. Perhaps she had been too long patient. Who could tell what depths of endurance lay beneath her passive calm to bring its own revenge? Whatever that might be I well deserved it, and bore her no ill will. I was transformed, expunged of all the crookedness and spite that until now had warped me. The held-in love that had been denied its natural course poured from me released, and in this new resilience there was no room for negative illusion or grievance stored, to twist the trivial absurdities of life and people into abortive shapes to fill my emptiness; for I was filled, replenished, brimming over; and this that had come to me was no waking dream but an exuberant reality to make me want to shout to highest heaven that I loved the world and God, Papa, Selina, and myself in one, and all of that was nothing but a drop in the vast ocean of my love for Jonathan. . . .

"I have," Papa said, "asked you twice. Where have you been?"

"Detained," I said, unflinching. "I'll tell you everything, Papa. I've lots to tell."

Selina, rising, murmured something about letters for the post, and went out as Hood came in, bringing a plate of dried mutton and vegetables.

"I don't want anything to eat, thank you, Hood," I said. "But I'll take coffee. Can I have my coffee here with you, Papa?"

Ignoring this filial desire for his company, "I am still waiting," he announced, "for your reply—where you have been, why you did not keep your appointments with the dressmaker, why you sent the carriage home with the ridiculous prevarication that you prefer to walk? To walk," Papa with sinister emphasis repeated, "in the pouring rain, which seems to me a somewhat Spartan form of exercise—and above all, why," he paused again to smile, "this peculiar hilarity?"

"I did not know I was hilarious, Papa, but I do know I am happy."

"A not uncommon state of being," he commented, with a wider show of teeth, "for a young lady who—God willing—will be married in eight weeks."

I said: "Papa, God isn't willing."

His monocle dropped: he set down the cup raised to his lips and put those lips together. His beard quivered.

"Nor," I said, "am I." And saying it I got up from the table, gripping the top of my chair. "I wish to speak to you, Papa."

His eyes revolving slowly, lifted to transfix me where I stood, but that icy stare had now no power to chill.

"Papa, I want to tell you that I find I cannot possibly marry Hugh Titterton. I don't love him. I don't even *like* him. We are totally unsuited." The words slid from me as though they had been learned; indeed so familiar was this scene to me—as once before when I had talked with Jonathan that moonlit night in Mimi's garden I had experienced a similar sense of repetition, as though all this had been enacted in some long-distant past and now recurred just in this minute of time, in this room, and in this space, in this dimension. "It would be wrong and could only bring misery to both of us. Hugh and I are like oil and water. We don't mix. We don't *know* each other—we don't speak the same language. There are a hundred reasons why I cannot marry him, but I will give you only two. I don't love Hugh Titterton and I *do* love . . . someone else."

And on this momentous utterance I waited.

If horns had grown upon my head to strike the ceiling and I had towered larger in his sight as seconds passed, his face could not have shown a greater wonder; then through the void that followed the percussion of first shock, I saw him gather up his stunned force with an effort which even in that moment I applauded. Almost visibly he seemed to swell; his rigid shoulders heaved with the breath that rushed through his fallen lips; he dragged his smile to them and pulling his dignity about him like a garment that has been snatched by the wind, he rose.

"You must be—you *are* insane." His voice steadied, taking reassurance from the sound of it. "This is a case of temporary insanity. No more, no less."

"No, Papa. I am quite normal—more normal now than I have ever been. I realize that this will be a blow to you, but my mind is quite made up. I know I'm not of age and I know you can forbid my marriage with any man you have not chosen for me, but even though I am what I believe is called a minor—is that right?—I am not below the legal age of consent. I am over sixteen. His name, Papa, if you would care to hear it, is Jonathan Rourke. He is twenty-four and Irish—you won't like that—and he is not at all rich. And, Papa, I want you to know that if I can't have your permission to marry him—I am afraid I'll have to marry him without it."

He had raised his hand, clenching it in mid-air as though to slay my words, but nothing now could stop me. "It is quite

true, about Madame Clarice. I've not been for any fittings since I met him quite by chance again—some days ago. I met him first at the O'Connors'—at a party. Yes, Papa, you'd better hear everything, if you can bear it. You would not let me go that night to see their daughter Mimi dance at the Opéra Comique. I expect you had your reasons—but I did go all the same. It was the same night, if you remember, that you said you were going to a Freemasons' dinner——”

A choking sound came from his parted lips; his eyes, unmasked, were terrible in their leaping fear, but I spared him that humiliation. . . . Let him keep what face he could. I hurried on. “And I met him at the party given after the performance at the O'Connors' house, and on the day of Grandpapa's funeral I went out—I expect you remember that too—because, like Aunt Rosie, I felt I couldn't bear to hear the reading of the will. And we met again in Kensington Gardens. Since then we have been meeting every day. I suppose you think that's very wicked. Well, I don't. I love him, and there's no sin in love. But it is the greatest of all sins to marry where love can never be. I thought perhaps I might love Hugh in time—or at least respect him—but I can't even do that. He is empty of everything except self-love and that's no love at all. And I'm sick to death of lying and pretending. I've often told you lies, Papa. You've driven me to lies the way you've tried to crush me with your perpetual sneers and shouting. There has never been a moment in my life that I have not dreaded to hear you come into the house or felt glad when you went out of it. Such a weak maggot of a creature that I've been, always so afraid of you. But I'm not afraid of you now, because I've found myself . . . and Jonathan.”

He had advanced until he stood an arm's length from me. I could hear his breathing and saw his eyes again. It might have been the crimson-shaded lamp above the table that turned them red; or the bursting torrent of his fury.

Truly a man beside himself with passion is an awesome sight; only love's urgency can condone the storm of beating blood, and sense that aches with the consuming flame of its desire, to lift the beast in man to God. But when rage alone is loosened in blind torment of hate-lust to annihilate with thunder the puny atom that defies it, when thought dissolves, and reason, shattered, is possessed, then man is less than beast and more than devil, and an uglier sight to look upon than that I've yet to see: and seeing what I saw, I hid my eyes with my arm,

instinctively on guard . . . too late. His fist descending struck me clean against the temple and I dropped and lay, to hear his voice in waves of distance . . . "Bad blood . . . low life . . . like mother like daughter. Go . . . get up and go. Never while I live . . . your face again. You whoring low-bred . . . bastard!"

Yes, that I heard, and the slam of the door that followed, to bring me back to myself with a dull throb of pain in my temple, and the brightening clamour of my joy that he was gone.

I had risen to my feet and was standing, calm, collected, rearranging my tumbled hair in front of a wall-mirror. My face peered at me very white above my mourning black.

Hood came to clear away.

"Are you sure you've had enough dinner, Miss Jenny? You don't seem to have eaten anything."

"Quite enough, Hood, thank you. I'm sorry I was late."

"It's quite all right, miss," she gave me a quick look. "Are you feeling queer, Miss Jenny? You're that pale."

"It's nothing. A slight headache. I'm tired and I think I'll go to bed. Good night, Hood."

"Good night, miss."

At the door I turned and came back. "I've known you all my life, Hood, haven't I? Or as long as I remember."

"That's right miss, I came here just before you was born, eighteen years ago."

"That's a long time, Hood."

"Yes, miss, it is."

I watched her pick up from the floor and fold my table-napkin, place the port on the sideboard, her movements capable and deft; her hair, under the goffered cap with its starched streamers, had grown grey in service. Her face moulded into the wooden inscrutability of the well-trained servant, told me nothing. Whatever she had heard below-stairs of recent storm above, it was not her place to pass remark, but her silence spoke as loud as speech proclaiming her my ally, as ever in the past when she had found my hidden porridge-bowl and kept her counsel. So she would keep it now.

"Hood," I said, "you must have known my mother."

"Yes, miss, I did, but not to say well. I was only second housemaid then and didn't go into the parlour."

"Am I at all like her to look at, Hood? There's only one photograph of her in Papa's study and I don't think it can be a good likeness."

"It isn't, miss. She was much better-looking than that. And yes—I think you're very like her, only she was taller and bigger altogether. But then, of course, I only knew her when she was——" Hood paused and hemmed, to supplement discreetly, "—just before you was born. You have her eyes though, miss. Lovely eyes they were too, and eyelashes like yours, Miss Jenny, long and curling up."

"Was she—did you—was she nice to you, Hood?"

"Nice, miss? Oh, yes, a very pleasant-spoken lady. I always remember her pretty way of speaking. Your voice is just like hers, Miss Jenny—the way you clip your words—and clear as a bell."

"I see. Thank you, Hood."

"But Nurse could tell you more than me, miss. She knew madam longer than I did."

Nurse had never told me very much: some day I must ask her. . . .

"Hood," I said, "I wanted you to know. I shall be leaving here quite soon."

"Yes, miss, to be married."

She had done what she had to do and stood holding the laden tray ready to depart.

"I'm not going to be married—to Mr Titterton, Hood."

An almost imperceptible quiver crossed her face, but the force of habit held.

"Is that so, Miss Jenny? Well!"

No question asked, but her eyes had in them something of the look of an anxious dog's; a look that brought a hardness to my throat.

"Yes, Hood." I took another step forward. "And if you hear that I have gone away . . . or anything, I want you to remember that I've always been fond of you and Cook. And Alice . . . I shan't forget you, and I'll write to you sometimes and you must write to me. And if ever I have a home of my own nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have all three of you to come and be my——"

I could get no further. The day's strain had been severe, the climax shattering.

Hood put down the tray, a parlour-maid no longer, but the woman who had known me at my birth.

"Don't, Miss Jenny, dear," her hand brushed my bowed head. "Don't upset yourself. I knew the master would be on at you for being late, but do nothing in a hurry that you're

likely to be sorry for. Take your time to think it over. I don't know what it's all about, but I can guess. Cook and me have watched you getting thinner, which isn't natural at your age, and we've been that worried—and Alice, too, telling us that you've been taking pills to make you sleep. What Nurse would say if she could know—I'm sure—and you'll excuse me, dearie, but we've not been happy for you, not at all."

I put my arms round her to hug and say: "You *will* be happy for me, though. And so will I. Happier than I have ever been. And I'm not crying now for *unhappiness*, but simply because . . . because . . . I don't know why!"

And I kissed her hard and rushed from the room and up to my own to lie on my bed and sob my heart out there.

This indulgence didn't last for long. I had that to do which must be done and quickly. A crisis had been reached from which there could be—*must* be no retreat. My way lay clear before me. I had been told to go, and go I would and with no hesitation, no backsliding, no false beliefs and barriers of social custom raised to shirk the issue. I had suffered a hunger of mind and soul; that hunger now would be appeased. All that my spirit sought, in loneliness, in dreams in youthful turbulent perplexities was now offered for my taking.

I had been given this much grace, a second chance.

* * *

I may have dozed during the night, lying fully dressed upon my bed, but I dared not sleep lest from exhaustion I should sleep too long, and I must be away before the household was astir. This time it would be easy. I had been through more formidable rehearsal than this final escape in the dawn of a winter's morning.

I had my plan of action. I knew Jonathan's address in Bloomsbury; I would take my case to him and let him decide the next step. The fact that I must make the first advance did not deter me. If, as in one awful moment, I allowed myself to fear, he might refuse to be a partner in this outrage to propriety—since I was bound to admit that for all his fervent declaration he had not once mentioned marriage if such improbability should by woeful chance arise that he refuse to take me in and turn me out, then there was an alternative . . . or two.

Visions of the Thames Embankment loomed before me as I

lay, the river black and slimy and myself a corpse upon it. But I could swim, and my heart misgave me that undoubtedly I would; or I might seek a situation, follow in my mother's steps as governess. With my knowledge of French and smattering of German, to say nothing of my music, it would not be difficult to find a post. Advertisements for governesses appeared in all the daily papers. Or I could go to Mike and beg from him the surplus of his elementary pupils, or serve behind a counter in a shop. But above all cloudiest imaginings as to what might or might not be the end of this beginning, one light shone beacon-clear. My father had disclaimed me. I was free.

The blow his fist had struck and which was fast developing into a fine plum-coloured bruise around my eye, was nothing to the impact of that one word where implication served less to besmirch the memory of her whose blood alone of certainty was mine, than to envelop it in new exciting glamour.

If wishful thinking could have envisaged my origin with greatness, then I was ready to believe myself endowed. My father may have been a genius, musical for preference, and that I thought, inflatedly, would well account for me. Or he might have been perhaps of Celtic strain, hence my *soi-disant* Papa's detestation of the Irish. Indeed, so far these flights of fancy led me, I was in two minds whether or not to debit Mike's account with my begetting, only that I remembered he had told me he had not set foot in England till two years after he was married, and by that time I was born. But behind all wild unreasoning, the reluctant belief held that Papa had named me Bastard as a term of vile opprobrium, which might mean everything or nothing. . . . And I would never know.

Having arrived at this unsatisfactory conclusion, I turned to more immediate affairs. My monthly allowance of pocket-money from Papa—or Mr Drew, as henceforth I decided I must call him—paid at the rate of one pound per week was overdue. The half-sovereign so rashly bestowed on the waitress yesterday was my last gold piece. A careful inventory of my entire valuation produced a row of pearls that had been my mother's—a gold bangle, a gold watch, a garnet ring, and two-and-sevenpence-halfpenny. The pearls I put aside; those I would never sell. The remainder, if needs must, I would. Two shillings would take me in a cab to Jonathan. After that he—or the Lord—would provide.

I packed a small portmanteau, stuffing into it enough clothes for a week. And then I wrote two letters, one addressed to

Nicholas Drew, Esquire, the other to Hugh Titterton, enclosing his ring.

The first was short, the second long, and so much rewritten and torn up to start again, that I was stiff with writer's cramp before I sealed and stamped it finally. And for all my pains I cannot now recall one word of it. . . .

Dawn was in the sky when this was done. In half an hour the servants would be up. I took my bag, found it heavier than I had thought, bumped it after me down the stairs with what seemed to be an unconscionable noise, and laid the letter for Papa on the salver in the hall. Hugh's would have to be sent by registered post.

The front door was bolted, but easily unfastened. As I slipped out I heard the clang of milk-cans in the area. I must hurry. . . .

A cold, clear, windy morning, with yesterday's rain in the puddles below and a streak of pink above. The sun was coming and my spirits rose.

I found progress impeded by my bag which weighed me down; praying for a cab, I saw a sweep, and him I knew to be an omen of good luck, for so Nurse had always told me: and that if you bowed three times and crossed your fingers when you passed him, and said "Good morning, Mr Sweep," you'd get your wish. All this I did and received from him a wide white grin that seemed to split his sooty face in two and from the policeman at the corner an eyeful of curiosity and a step in my direction to put me in a panic. Ladies in their right mind did not stand and bow and smile in the middle of the street to no one in particular.

I hastened on.

A masher in evening dress with his opera-hat on the back of his head, who was ineffectually trying to force his key into the lock of his front door, ogled me, and muttered--what, I could not hear; and still no cab in sight and my arm almost out of its socket. And now the sun was up and I was down: for if a cab did not come soon, my flight would be discovered; the maids by this time would be at their work and Alice calling me with early morning tea. I was too near home for safety. Then, at the other side of the Square, I spied a hansom. Well, it would have to be a hansom. I had done it before, I must do it again, and at the top of my lungs I shouted. The cab turned and came towards me. I thanked God.

My bag and self deposited, I gave the cabman Jonathan's address and told him not to drive too fast, for I thought it most

unlikely that Jonathan would be awake if I descended on him at this hour. The cab accordingly proceeded at a crawl till, in a fever of impatience, I poked at the trapdoor to tell him to go quicker, and off he went at breakneck speed, taking corners on one wheel, to make me poke again and inquire if his horse were in training for the Derby. Some pleasant back-chat then ensued in which I learned that his horse was one of the World's Wonders, having been born in a circus and, though liable to fits, had more sense than all the politicians put together. I could believe it or believe it not, that Orse could tell a Liberal or Conservative a mile off by the smell, and on one occasion when Lord Salisbury had been driven in this Ear to the Ouse last Thursday week to be exact, that Orse had stamped when Is Lordship got in and neighed when Is Lordship got out, and if that didn't show that Orse's inclinations then he'd like to know what did?

After which impressive information I had not the face to ask for change of a half-crown, although the fare was only eighteen-pence.

A diminutive maid in a dirty apron, no cap, with a smut on her nose and a dewdrop on the end of it, was cleaning the steps when I arrived at the house in Charlotte Street where Jonathan lodged. The front door stood wide open, offering a glimpse of a dingy hall and dingier staircase.

"Is there——" I faltered, somewhat dashed by this unprepossessing view and an all-pervading odour of tom-cats—"have you a Mr Rourke living here?"

"If you mean the *Honourable* Mr Rourke," the midget of a maid corrected while she favoured me and my black eye with a stare of unalloyed suspicion, "'e ain't up yet."

"Could I—would it be possible for me to wait until he is?"

The child—she was not more than fourteen—shifted her examination of myself to my portmanteau. "'Ave you come to stay? 'Cause if you 'ave, you can't. We're full."

"No, I haven't come to stay," I said with no assurance, for I was almost sure I had, "but I would like to leave my bag here if I may, until I have found somewhere to——" I smiled at her—"put it."

She returned my smile with another look expressive of contempt, and wiping the dewdrop from her nose with the back of her bare arm, she said: "If you'll go in an wyte till I've finished 'ere, I'll tyke you up to 'is sittin'-room. I expect he'll let you

leave it there with 'im. Mind 'ow you walk where I've cleaned." And as an afterthought she added, "Miss."

I took my bag, very careful to mind how I walked, and sat down on a chair in a linoleumed hall that smelled of mice and cabbage. The child rose from her knees and heaved up her pail, calling to me from the steps, "I'm going down the back way with this 'ere, and then I'll come and fetch yer bag. You'd better shut the door or we'll 'ave all the cats in else."

I shut the door and returned to my seat. Presently I heard a shuffle of feet and the child appeared from below, this time in a cap, with a duster tucked into her apron and carrying a filled coal-scuttle, two bundles of wood, some newspapers, and a dustpan and brush. "I'm just going up to light 'is fire," she perfunctorily announced, "I shan't be two ticks."

I watched her go staggering up, dropping first a bundle of wood, then the dustpan, and finally the brush, which went hopping gaily down the stairs until it reached the mat. I picked it up.

"Let me take this for you," I offered, "and the wood, and the dustpan."

She paused on the half-landing to survey me in open-mouthed astonishment. Such offers clearly did not often come her way.

"You'll dirty yer gloves," she warned me, "that wood's been in the coal-'ole."

"My gloves are black," I said, "so it won't show if they are blacker."

She wavered. "But 'is room ain't tidied yet."

"Never mind that, I'd rather wait in his sitting-room than in the hall."

"Well," she grudgingly conceded, "if yer *must*. I can manage the wood if you'll tyke this." And she tendered me the dustpan. "You can't hold it by its 'andle 'cause it ain't got one. It come orf in me 'and yesterday. You'd better go first as I'll 'ave to take me time. This scuttle weighs a ton and a 'arf. Stryte up to the Third and be careful of the pile on the second."

Obeying these instructions with less regard for pails than for the dust of ages that lay thick upon the banisters and in uncovered corners, and with a lurking sense of beetles, I arrived, prompted by the little maid breathing heavily behind me, at the Third.

Setting down the coal-scuttle, the child drew her arm across her nose again, and remarking briefly, "Thenks," took from me the dustpan and darted forward to open the door of a room lit by a gas-jet in full blaze under a cracked glass globe.

"There now! 'E's done it again. Left it on all night. These writin' ones—they're all a bit up the Pole. We 'ad another of 'em 'ere last year, wrote for the pipers 'e did—and not only left 'is gas on arf the time but neely burnt the 'ouse down goin' to sleep with 'is candle alight and the window open to set his bed-curtains afire. But they can't 'elp it, I suppose. It's the way they're made."

And with this ethical forbearance for the peculiarities of literary gentlemen, the little maid, bidding me come in, stood on an arm-chair to turn off the gas and proceeded with much clatter to pull up the broken blinds and set the room to rights. Her efforts produced, however, little alteration in its general aspect, except to raise the dust in clouds from one place to settle in another. I shuddered to think what horrors unrevealed might crawl behind those yellow-ochre baskets of blue roses papering the walls, or what incrustations of dirt lay beneath that greasy carpet. Sitting gingerly on a horse-hair sofa, I for one moment wondered how Jonathan could endure to live even temporarily in such dismal surroundings, but as an inhabitant of higher planes I judged him to be above mundane affairs, and oblivious of his environment.

A smell of burning wood and paper from the newly lit fire defied the stale reminder of countless meals eaten in that room, whose air had never been renewed by ventilation. I went to the window and opened it; a second later it fell with a bang.

"It won't sty'e up," remarked the little maid complacently. "I'm always telling Er about it but She won't have it mended. Being winter now She says no one wants to open windows. No, and you can't do the other one, neether. It's stuck."

I returned to my seat.

"What time do you call Mr Rourke as a rule?"

"When 'e rings."

"I see. And what time is that?"

"All times. It weren't till midday yesterday."

I glanced at a clock on the mantelshelf, according to which the time was now twenty minutes to three.

"That's stopped," the little maid superfluously informed me, and pointing to the double doors painted a dim chocolate to imitate oak and which led, I presumed, to Jonathan's bedroom, she said: "I'll knock if you like."

I hesitated. "Yes, but I'll give you a note." I glanced around; a littered desk stood between the windows. I found a pen and

ink and a sheet of paper. On this I scribbled: 'I am here in the next room. J.D.' And folded it over.

"Please take this," I said, "to Mr Rourke."

With ill-concealed scorn for me and my manœuvres, and holding the note as though it were a hornet, the child scuttled off, to return a minute later slightly breathless. "'E says you're to stye till 'e's dressed and 'ave breakfast with him—and, look," she opened her grimy fist to show me a gold piece, "'e give me this to go and buy fruit and 'ot rolls and 'oney and cream and I don't know 'ow he thinks I can go waltzin' orf to do 'is shoppin' with four breakfasts to get besides 'is bath, which 'e will 'ave every day instead of once a week like anyone else."

"What does Mr Rourke have for breakfast as a rule?"

"Nothin' much. 'E likes 'oney but 'e's run out. 'E won't drink Er coffee because 'e says She done the washin'-up in it, and 'e makes 'is own tea—Chinese—which 'e keeps up 'ere. 'E didn't say what kind of fruit he wanted neether, and in any case," she said conclusively, "'e'll have to wyte."

"Is there," I inquired, "a fruiterer's near here?"

"Not nearer than the Tottenham Court Road."

A pause ensued in which I was given telepathically to understand that my presence in that room and at that hour was offensive.

"If," I said ingratiatingly, "that fruit was meant for me I don't really think I want it, nor any breakfast—just a cup of tea. I'll make it for Mr Rourke if you will tell me where it is and let me have a kettle. And I can help you tidy up here, too—if I may."

"What about this arf-soverrin?" asked the child coldly.

"Hadn't you better put it somewhere safe, or let me take it? I'll give it back to Mr Rourke."

She eyed me sharply.

"No, I think I'd better give it 'im meself." It was evident she held me very low. "I'll bring the kettle when I fetch yer bag. I've only got one pair of 'ands."

I agreed humbly that this was a disadvantage.

Wrinkling her button of a nose in a momentary grin, "You and Mr Rourke," she said, "both talk the syme—so la-de-da—one doesn't know what the Juice yer gettin' at, but I tell yer stryte I weren't born yesterdye. And it's tidied 'ere now but you might keep an eye on the fire. It looks as if you'll 'ave to use the bellows. You'll find them 'angin' on the bell-knob, and

'e'll 'ave to do without 'is bath to-dye, that's all, and chance it."

With which ultimatum she departed.

Finding that the bellows failed all attempts to coax the smoking fire into flame, I was ineffectually applying matches to the blackened remnants of wood and smouldering paper when Jonathan, in a purple dressing-gown, with lather on his chin, burst into the room to tell me:

"Such an extraordinary thing! I was having a dream of you just like this, kneeling and lighting a fire—only it was on top of a mountain in sunset—and you had something blue on your head and looked like Our Lady of Sorrows, and then Augusta banged on the door and I woke."

Sitting back on my heels I began to laugh, and laughed so much that I began to cry. He knelt beside me saying, his face an inch from mine, "Don't my loveliest darling. Are you going to have hysterics? God damn this cursed lather—I can't kiss you—let me go!"

He got up and rushed away while I giggled myself calm, and very soon he was back again with his face fresh-shaved and smelling of lemons and lilac. . . .

I told him what I had to tell with reservations, and a fine jumble I think it must have been. He listened without remark until I had finished, when holding me from him he looked into my face and, "What," he asked, "is the matter with your eye?"

I lied then for the last time in my life.

"I banged into the door-post in the dark."

He was silent, gazing. I saw his eyes change colour from deep to deeper blue.

"You didn't," he said, still staring, "do that against a door-post."

"I did—I was in such a hurry——" I turned my head away. "Does it make me look hideous?"

He rose from where he sat beside me on the sofa. "If," Jonathan said slowly, "your father did that to you—I'm going to him now to lay him out."

"No," I cried distractedly, "he didn't! I promise you he didn't. Whatever makes you think a thing like that? I swear——"

He cut me short. "You're the sweetest of worst liars in the world."

"I'm not," I screamed, "he *didn't* do it—and don't for mercy's sake go near him. He'll be searching for me now. I dare not run

the risk of being found. Oh, what does a black eye matter? We've more important things to discuss than——"

"I wish to know," he interrupted doggedly, "did your father hit you?"

"Haven't I *said* he didn't? Pray, love—will you listen? I've come away without a shilling."

"I'd give you," said Jonathan, "a hundred thousand shillings if I had them."

"You would—I know you would. But twenty will be enough, if you could lend . . ." I faltered, "just until I've found . . . I suppose I shall have to find some work to do."

I waited.

He began to pace up and down the room lost, seemingly, in thought. And as I watched those long cat-like strides a crowding sense of horror struck me dumb. What if after all I had mistaken his intention, had forced myself, my life, upon him uninvited? . . . A cold dew broke out upon my forehead. With my handkerchief stealthily I mopped. And still he walked, his hands behind his back, brows bent and shoulders hunched, to wheel suddenly and ask: "What sort of work?"

My mouth went dry.

"I though—a governess perhaps—or music-teacher."

He had never heard me play. I think he didn't even know I could.

"You! A governess? Impossible. And as for music——Good Lord! You can't teach music."

"Why can't I?" I retorted, stung. "I'll have to do something for my living. Obviously."

He looked utterly bewildered.

"But where will you live? You can't live here in this stinking hole. I'm only here because I'm broke—for the time being. Having had some little difference with my father, he has seen fit to cut my allowance of four hundred a year down to half, and I've not yet been paid my advance royalty—which won't amount to much in any case. It never does for a first book. But when I do get it, I shall move."

I sat in speechless agony.

"Besides, it wouldn't do," he went on doubtfully, "for you to live here in the same house with me. Or would it? I suppose one has to show that much regard for the conventions."

"Yes," I agreed, nodding like a mandarin. "Oh, yes, of course . . . conventions."

"Not that I ever consider them," said Jonathan. "Oneself and one's life is the important thing, and concern for the moral attitude of others is the direct cause of that mental asphyxiation from which your impossible father and all of his kind are suffering, and who unfortunately comprise the large majority of the reading public here in England. Hence the fact that I shall never earn a living by my pen. However, that's beside the point."

Very still I sat, with a darkness in my sight and a bursting in my ears and all around, above, below me . . . emptiness.

"I have it!" His jubilant voice recalled me from extinction. "Thrice unmitigated jackass that I am. Of course! The only possible solution. . . . We'll get *married!*"

I close my eyes.

"Now why," persisted Jonathan in wonder, "did I not think of that before? I suppose I was too blind with love to see a step beyond. And marriage does seem perhaps too far a step beyond. But now I realize—most certainly we must get married. You know I'm a Catholic? I suppose you're not."

I shook my head.

"Then," said Jonathan decisively, "it will have to be before the registrar. I'm not very clear about these things, but I believe one can be married any time by special licence. I must go to the local whatever-it-is and find out. And if we can't be married now to-day—why then we will—to-morrow."

With a weakness in my knees I rose and went to him.

"Belóved idiot," I whispered, "you don't know it, but you've very nearly killed me."

And I drew his surprised face down to mine and held it there.

IX

THERE was no time to think, no pause in our reckless preparations. Once embarked upon his Odyssey, Jonathan was not to be turned back.

For the thirty-six hours that must intervene before we could be duly and truly married, we decided I should stay at Brown's Hotel in the suite occupied by Jonathan's father on his visits to London. Jonathan took me to the hotel in a cab and what he told the manager I never knew: but I take it that Lord Curraghmore must eventually have paid the bill, for it was certain that Jonathan did not.

Having caught from me my infection of alarm lest Papa should track me down and drag me forcibly away from him, he had insisted on a special licence. We both realized that my position as a minor was precarious. Jonathan, however, surmounted that obstacle by blatantly inscribing my age as twenty-two upon the registration form. Our marriage cost him thirty pounds, nor did I have an inkling till long afterwards that he had pawned his gold repeater watch to pay for it.

From my father I heard nothing; no comment upon or answer to the second letter I had written from a *poste restante* address, announcing that I was Jennifer Drew no longer, but Jennifer Rourke. From Belle I received an eight-page denunciation of 'my vile and abominable crime,' as she was pleased to call it, and as no doubt to her it was, and terminating in a decision never to see or speak to me again. Laura—dear Laura, who had faced poverty and Papa to gain her love—sent me a long expensive cable from Malta wishing me good luck and assuring me that she would have done the same for Harry. She sent me, too, a cheque that she could ill afford.

Hugh wrote declaring himself heart-broken, not so much for the loss of a wife who had proved herself capable of the lowest depths of duplicity—to have found *that* out in time he considered

was a mercy—but for his own lack of good judgment in having chosen so unwisely. He would, however, choose again and well.

Apparently he did, for he was married within six months to his Miss Gallstone. He is a great-grandfather now, and eighty-four. . . .

So with one blow, as an axe fells a branch from a tree, I was severed from all that lay behind me to face my unknown future. And with what high hopes I went to it. How full life was, how splendid, how fraught with gay enchantment, and youth's insatiable longings. . . . I think there never were two lovers more in love. I can recall no day in that first year of our marriage when on waking I did not thank God for every minute that I lived. That much I have, to keep, a cherished fragment of unfaded spring in the wintered ashes of remembrance. No secret terror shared was risen yet from our deep wells of happiness to stalk beside us, silently devouring. . . .

One year we had of exquisite fulfilment, of passion's witchery and sense unfolding to eager new discoveries in him and in myself. Although my senior in age, he was immensely less experienced in all that had to do with what he called the mere 'business' of life. One of Jonathan's most endearing qualities was his irresponsibility to and total disregard of all those hide-bound standards by which I had been raised. That certain obligations to the social scheme of things existed must be recognized, I knew, but he did not. His head was in the clouds; I took upon myself to keep it there, guarding him from all importunate approach. If he talked with a freedom that shocked me and beside which Mike's profanity was mild, I stayed unruffled. I enjoyed being shocked by Jonathan. The sound of his swearing was a piquant contradiction to his supersensitivity. It humanized him as did also his incongruous delight in hunting and all to do with horses. It speaks much for his devotion that he uncomplainingly relinquished his life's sport, and sold his two hunters in Ireland to pay his contribution to the upkeep of our home. If I had little money sense, he had less. He was extravagant and generous to folly. I soon learned that it was I who must hold the double reins of household management and finance. Starting married life on nothing, we had a windfall.

Having missed the reading of Grandpapa's will, I was unaware that I had been left by codicil a legacy of a thousand pounds. This to be paid to me 'in the event,' so I was informed by letter from my father's head clerk, 'of the death of

the late Mr Nicholas Drew before your marriage.' I think he must have known. . . .

As no stipulation had been made as to whom or how or where I should be married, I came into full possession of what seemed to me a fortune.

We found a little house tucked away in a corner of Hampstead Village near to the church of the Sacred Heart, whose presiding priest, Father Ignatius, at Jonathan's desire, re-married us in the rites of the Catholic faith after the legal ceremony had been duly performed.

More than half my thousand pounds was spent on furnishing, to say nothing of a Bechstein grand. We laid no limit to our taste and choice, which, influenced by William Morris in simplicity of line and texture, cost considerably more to achieve than I, at most, had bargained for. But the result was worth it. The small panelled rooms glowed with creamy paint and starry-blossomed chintz, and we ransacked curio shops for Anne's walnut and Sheraton's mahogany. The cottage had been built in 1703 and had the date engraved in stucco over the porch, but some former tenant had added an Adam fireplace to the drawing-room, or, as Jonathan would insist on calling it, the withdrawing-room. Our sole concession to modernity was a bathroom at the sacrifice of a powder closet: and for serving-maid we had Augusta.

Yes, we took her from the house in Charlotte Street, although neither Jonathan nor I were very certain whether or not we had committed an actionable offence in persuading a maid-servant to leave her situation. Jonathan said he believed there was something 'tedious' called enticement, but he wasn't sure if that applied only to wives enticed from husbands. To be on the safe side we gave Augusta a month's wages of ten shillings—poor Augusta, who had slaved for half a crown a week—and told her to put the money in an envelope with a letter addressed to Er and written by me, and on her first afternoon out we smuggled Augusta and her baggage up to Hampstead in a cab. We heard no more from Er.

Further acquaintance with Augusta revealed that she had been reared by the Little Sisters of the Cross, and born in a foundling home under which authority she had been given the name, in alphabetical order, of Augusta Atkins, having started she said in the new batch of I's.

Finding that her accent gave Jonathan the shudders, I toiled to correct it.

"A, not I, Augusta. Say if after me—A."

"Hay," Augusta repeated with amused forbearance.

"That's better, but without the aitch."

"Well, I'm shore!" returned Augusta, nettled. "You're always telling me *not* to drop me Heightches."

"In some words," I said patiently, "you have to."

Augusta rolled her eyes.

"Yes, Augusta, that very aitch you mustn't drop has no H before it."

"Well, how the Juice ——" began Augusta angrily.

"Now, Augusta, you know you mustn't say that. I'm sure you were not allowed to swear at the convent."

"Coo! That ain't swearin'. What about the master?"

Decidedly Jonathan would have to show a little more restraint.

"And," triumphantly pursued Augusta, "you ought 'ave 'eard the one I was with before I went to Er. She'd rise the roof."

"Raise, not rise," I parried feebly. "And Augusta, I hate to keep on telling you, but you must call me . . ." No, I simply couldn't tell her to say Madam.

"Yerly, mother dear?" Augusta irrepressibly suggested, "that's what Sister Mary Magdalene learned us to *resayte*."

I gave it up.

The weeks, the months flew on, each day a fresh adventure in this radiant exuberance of life.

Our first Christmas day together with Mike and Mitzi to dinner in the evening. . . . They brought with them a friend of theirs and Jonathan's whom I had never met before, a gaunt out-at elbows elderly young man, named Ernest Dowson. What a night that was! We had a turkey cooked by me with frequent reference to Mrs Beeton and much gratuitous advice from Augusta. I stuffed it with chestnuts and served it—shamingly raw, red at the joints, uneatable.

Withering Mike's cackles and Jonathan's curses with a look, Mitzi rose superbly to my rescue. "You laugh—is it? You go then and cook it yourselves, or eat the Stilton. . . ." And Mike and Jonathan shouting, "We want the turkey, the whole turkey, and nothing *but* the turkey——" banging on the table with fists and knives and forks, while Mitzi whispered soothingly in my red ear, "Leave it to me, *mein herz*. I put it back in the oven for twenty minutes more—just. You come and watch. I show you—it is not enough basted."

How we laughed, and how we ate, and drank red wine and

white wine and hot punch of Mike's concoction, but I saw Jonathan pour his tumblerful back into the punch-bowl when he thought nobody was looking. Mike's recipe was certainly strong and caused me to see everything and everybody in a shining rosy mist, and to kiss Ernest Dowson under the mistletoe, thinking he was Mike, and finding he was not, to tell him solemnly: "I once had a horrible maid like a white slug—" and then immediately to forget what I had meant to say.

Ernest Dowson, as he appeared to me at that first hazy sight of him, was untidy, very shabby, very drunk. I have a dim recollection of him standing in the middle of the room, sweeping his wispy dank hair from his forehead in an exaggerated gesture as a prelude to the recitation of a poem—and that when he had done Mike dragged me to the piano and made me play—I can't remember what, and that Dowson called for 'madder music, stronger wine!' . . . Nor did any of us know that he had pronounced a phrase born of the minute and destined to live, though he died.

Then watching them go, opening the door to a surprising world of snowflakes falling giddily out of the blackness, powdering the path and Mitzi's fur hood and the bare heads of Mike and Dowson, and the dim shoulders of the cabman at the gate. And everybody thanking everybody else with a great shaking of hands and kissing of me, and singing of 'Auld Lang Syne.' . . .

Our first spring: watching the crocuses come up yellow, mauve and white on the strip of lawn in our front garden, and the bursting, shouting green and the heath ablaze with gorse and bank-holiday fun. . . . My love and I going off together to have cocoa-nut shies and rides on the roundabout, to buy tiddlers and mingle with the crowd, till Jonathan said he couldn't stand the smell and would have to go home or be sick.

June . . . and that telegram from Ireland to tell us that Lord Curraghmore, whom I had never seen, was dead of a stroke, and the agony of being left alone when Jonathan had to hurry off to Dublin for the funeral. A whole week of separation . . . an eternity . . . and the heaven of reunion when he came back.

Jonathan's father had left him almost nothing. The estate passing to his elder brother Patrick, was encumbered to the verge of bankruptcy. We had little more to live on than the dwindling remains of my legacy, but Jonathan was working on another book and we were confident it would make a fortune. If it did not, we had still enough to pay the rent. But the

book hung fire. Jonathan went through the most appalling period of what he called writer's aphasia, when he would sit for a whole morning with a pen in his hand, and not a word on the blank sheet before him. I dared not go in: I dared not call him to his dinner, I dared not play a note on the piano, I dared hardly stir.

One day Augusta, dusting in the hall, began to sing dismally and flat. 'White wings that never grow weary,' and Jonathan rushed from the room, his hair over one eye where he had tugged it, screaming, "Stop! Stop that bloody—*stop* it! You fiend of hell——" and seized her by the arm to shake her till she, in terror, bit him.

What a scene *that* was to be sure! With Augusta in tears, Jonathan in torment, and me, a buffer between the two of them, attempting to placate.

"I ask you—how——" demanded Jonathan, "do you suppose I can create with that caterwauling cockney at my door? I must be alone. I'm suffering—you don't know—you can't possibly imagine the unutterable torture it is to sit hour after hour unable to put into words what is seething and bellowing inside you—look! Look here!" He pulled me to his desk to show me pages of scrawl; blotted, erased, illegible. "That's one week's work. A whole week's *work*." His voice squeaked hysterically. "Hopeless. Nothing. Dead. A child—Augusta—could do better than that. Not a sentence, not a word that makes sense or *feels*. I'm done. Finished. It will never come back. I've lost it. God! I can't write. I'm *not* a writer. George Moore told me once that he had fits of this sort of thing. I don't believe him. Nobody has—nobody could—I won't go on with it. I can't——" He sat down at his desk, laid his head on his arms and wept, great shuddering sobs.

I stood beside him, powerless to help, unable to share, although I, too, had known in lesser degree this soul-searing desolation, when I had tried to image in my music the tumult of my thoughts. . . . The way sound unclosed, wave under wave, rhythm within rhythm, there for your taking in eager brief expectancy and then—the obscure distorted squawk, the strangled birth.

"What hell—what hell!" groaned Jonathan. "Why aren't I a bus-driver? I'll *be* a bus-driver. Marvellous to sit aloft driving a pair of magnificent beasts in all weathers. Why am I a writer? God knows why I was born. Let's go out." He sprang up, scattering papers, pen, ink, "we'll go to the play—the Savoy. I must hear some Gilbertian patter to restore me to sanity. I'm losing

all sense of values—drowned in my own piddle. Don't leave me——” he clutched my hand, “don't leave me for an instant, you're my only hope. I'm in that state now when——” he stopped; his eyes rolled, showing the whites like a startled horse. I slid my arms round him, holding him close.

“Darling, of course I won't leave you. Yes, we'll go to the Savoy and see—what is it they're playing? Do you know? I'll look it up in the *Times*. And we'll have dinner at Verrey's first. A bottle of champagne——”

“No! For God's sake——” he clutched me again, “you know how I loathe drink. I don't *want* to drink.”

“Then you shan't,” I whispered, “I only thought——”

“*Don't* think!” he shouted, “you don't know, so don't think.”

I never did, and if I had would I have ever guessed? How could I guess? . . .

Then came the first anniversary of our wedding-day. The afternoon was closing in with shadows. I sat in our fire-lit room waiting for Jonathan who had gone to see his publishers. The book was not yet finished, but he had submitted what he had done of it for their approval, and had received an encouraging letter requesting an appointment to discuss the terms of a fresh agreement. His first novel, although enthusiastically acclaimed by the reviewers, had sold under a thousand copies, but that did not trouble Jonathan at all. I had, however, noticed that any adverse criticism upset him dreadfully; he always imagined that the author of it had been promoted to write as he did from some unjust and ulterior motive, born of the embitterment of failure; but although extraordinarily susceptible to the opinion of others, he was ready enough to see his own faults, condemn his own efforts. When I told him, “Surely you are the best critic of your work. You must know whether it is good or bad,” he replied, “Yes, I know. It is *because* I know that I can't bear to hear others endorse my doubts of Me. No true creative artist, whether he creates in words or paint or music, is ever satisfied. Only shoddy mediocrities are satisfied with their achievements because they have never achieved. But he who aspires to the highest must always seek, and always suffer. Perfection only is his goal, and he can never touch it. He flounders through the mire struggling always to reach upwards, and falling back to wallow in his own undigested verbosity. Yes, if I could play as *you* play, I would be satisfied. . . .”

“What!” I gaped at him, filled with momentary exultation,

immediately to be shattered. . . . "Because," said Jonathan, "you are a mere executive. The great minds of music have bestowed on you their wealth of material. All you have to do is to practise digital gymnastics in order to interpret, whereas I have to dig from my innermost depths the root of an idea. Writing—and by writing I don't mean the elaborate journalistic jargon which passes for literature to-day, but the demand of the intellect to keep itself alive, to translate every delicacy of thought and feeling into absolute sincerity, without losing the balance between the human concept and the spirit, writing then—*qua* writing, might well be described as an effort to express the inexpressible. There are perhaps half a dozen writers in this language who have done it. Walter Pater, De Quincey——"

"And Shakespeare," I uttered timorously.

He glanced at me, his eyes narrowing, cold, remote. Then his face relaxed; his smile lifted. "Yes, my sweet, Shakespeare. Only he didn't write books. And some people believe he didn't write at all."

"You mean—Bacon?"

I did try so humbly to follow him, painfully aware of my shortcomings, my colossal ignorance. . . .

"I mean," said Jonathan, kissing the top of my head, "*Ne m'importe que tu sois sage, sois belle. . . .*"

Sitting there in our little parlour waiting for him to come home on that November evening I remembered snatches of our talk and all other things besides. . . . How this year had flown, winged, breathless, gathering rare moments and folding them round us never to be lost.

The curtains were not yet drawn, the lamps not lit, the fire gave light enough, crackling and spluttering as though it were laughing at itself with a cosy dance of shadows on the walls and ceiling. Outside a branch of our plane tree, after which we had named the cottage, gave friendly taps against the window-pane. Dreamily I sat gazing at the fire, seeing in its glowing heart perhaps a symbol of my own, while my mind drifted lazily along slow-moving currents, piecing disconnected fragments into one consecutive design.

A year ago to-day. . . .

The goat-bearded man who had married us in that bare official room, the mumbled words so brusque, so quickly over, a pause and then. . . . "Put the ring on your wife's finger."

Wife! Was I his wife already? And Jonathan fumbling for the

ring, dropping it, picking it up and turning puce, and the goat-bearded man shaking hands with us both and wishing us despondently 'Much joy.' . . . The signing of my name as Jennifer Drew for the last time, with palpitations in case one of the two strangers called to witness—the registrar's clerks I think they must have been—would suddenly announce in ringing tones like the stranger in 'Jane Eyre' that 'The marriage cannot go on'—was null and void and I guilty of mis-statement, hereby declaring falsely that my age was twenty-two. But nothing happened. I was, by hook or crook, irrevocably Jonathan's wife.

Having brought with me from my father's house no other clothes but mourning, I had to be married in black, but Jonathan went out and bought me a hat. Emerald green. I was agonized. Green, of all unlucky colours, as raised in firm belief of Nurse's superstitions, I knew it bound to be. I dared not tell him so to hurt him. "Green for Ireland," said Jonathan with pride.

It was admittedly a lovely hat, small, to wear tilted over the eyes, its crown draped with an ostrich plume shading from *eau-de-nil* to indigo. The box it came in bore the magic name of Worth. I think he pawned one of his pearl studs to pay for it.

That lovely week in Dorset. . . . Arriving at the station and driving in the station fly to the one inn the place possessed, kept by the Parrot Man. Who but Jonathan could find exactly the right name for peculiar people, and why was it that all people seen with Jonathan *did* seem to be peculiar?

Do you remember the family of Masks that few days we spent at Brighton after your attack of influenza in the spring of '88? How they terrified us sitting there in the hotel lounge in a solemn group, never talking to each other, just sitting, staring vacantly out from their slits of eyes behind those pale blanks that could never have been faces, could only have been masks.

The father had a bulbous mask, shining, pinkly yellow, with a snout and a *crêpe* hair moustache plastered underneath it; the mother was a lipless, pasty, elongated mask; the daughters, younger, whiter replicas of her. We never heard them utter. We were fascinated, mesmerized. You said you'd make them speak. You got up and crossed the lounge and addressed the mother, "Excuse me, madam, are you using this chair?"

How more than frightening it was to hear the reply in a broad, nasal, north-country accent, with no vestige of expression or flicker of an eyelid: "Nao, you can 'arve it with pleasure."

You walked back to me carrying the chair, while all four

masks watched, and you seated yourself, muttering: "Hollow, hollow, hollow," without moving your lips like a ventriloquist to make me giggle uncontrollably, hysterically, disgracefully, that I had to flee the room.

And then the Parrot Man.

He was very old, but like Grandpapa he was also very young, lined, leathery, hairless. He had a little hawkish nose and wore a green frieze coat almost as bright as my hat, a yellow waistcoat and a red tie. "Very like a parrot," said Jonathan.

He used to sit with us in the oak-beamed parlour behind the bar that he let us have for our private sitting-room. It smelled of beer and old wine and old men, and was full of stuffed birds and improbable fish and foxes' faces. How they laughed when I remarked, "What a lot of foxes' faces you have here," and Jonathan said, "Masks. Weazel, not faces."

He had named me, too. I belonged to the mouse tribe, he said, or anything small of fur or feather—a squirrel, or a very soft miniature owl, but preferably something that had the tiniest possible hands and timid quick movements and brown velvet eyes.

"I'm not," I objected, "a weasel. Weasels are sly, wicked, destructive little things and their eyes are red, not brown."

"You're thinking," Jonathan said, "of the weasel that is spelled with an 's'. Those spelled with a 'z' mean something *very* different."

He and the Parrot Man talked about hunting. Hounds—not dogs, I must remember that—were meeting in the village the next day. The Parrot Man—he told us he was nearly eighty—hunted twice a week. He offered to mount Jonathan who had packed a pair of riding breeches without which he never travelled.

I stood at my bedroom window in my nightgown to watch them ride off together, the Parrot Man and Jonathan, riding away from me in the white mist of early morning to something I could never share with him who was my world. And after an interminable day, horror-fraught with visionary accidents of broken necks and bolting horses—the joy of his safe return, healthily, drowsily tired, too tired for love, falling asleep with his head on my shoulder in the great four-post bed that almost filled the room, to wake me in the dawn with his kisses. . . .

The tree tapped, a frail thin sound on the window-pane. A coal dropped from the fire, breaking the pictures I saw there. A tongue of flame shot up and died in whitened ash. I looked

at the clock and sprang to my feet. Good heavens, the time! And my chicken in the oven to be burned.

Such a meal as I—who by now had learned from Mitzi how to cook—had prepared for him to celebrate the close of our first year together, beginning with oysters and ending with strawberry ice from Gunter's, reposing in a pail in the scullery. I had bought, too, a half-bottle of champagne from the wine-shop in Heath Street. Surely for all his dislike of it he would not object to sipping a glass with me for luck.

I hurried to the kitchen to find Augusta diligently basting. "It's done to a turn," she said.

"Mr. Rourke is not in yet," I told her.

"Then I'd better tyke it out and keep it hot on top of the stove. And I'll not open the oysters till he comes. They'll spoil else."

"No," I said, "don't. He's sure to be in soon."

I went back to the parlour, mended the fire, peered out into the purple dusk, loth to light the lamps and draw the curtains to shut out the last of our day.

I was wearing the dress he loved most, a wine-red velvet, full skirted, cut square in the neck with a close-fitting bodice and long tight sleeves slightly puffed at the shoulders; the one Jonathan called my 'Renaissance' frock. How he would have loved the clothes the girls wear to-day—and how he hated the fashions of the 'eighties, those swathed hips, wasp waists and cumbrous draperies. . . . In the convex mirror on the wall I saw myself reflected, a small red diminished figure with a white blob of a face under dark wings of hair. The reddened shadows of the firelit room seemed to lose and dissolve me. I experienced again that illusive momentary feeling of 'outsideness'—a vague memory of childhood. Was this Me? This dwindled elf whose quick movements mocked my own. I turned from the sight of it to the piano and began to play a Nocturne of Chopin. My fingers were stiffening from want of use. I scarcely ever practised. I dared not practise while Jonathan was working, and when not at his desk he claimed all my time for walks on the Heath, visits to picture galleries, concerts. He must have me beside him always, wherever he went or whatever he did, beyond his work. If only to heaven. I groaned to myself, I could practice, for somewhere in my mind strayed the scattered notion that some day in the not far-distant future I might have to put my piano-playing to some purpose. Jonathan did not know, but I did, that funds were getting low. . . .

Suddenly I ceased, all my senses quivering with a queer nameless shock that stayed my fingers on the notes and sent a shudder to my spine. I sat, ears pricked for something that was not a sound yet heard. . . . Then in that charged expectancy it came, the sound of footsteps, heavy, slow, grazing the gravel path. A step, not Jonathan's. Another, one whom I had never known was there now in possession. . . .

I went to the window. Night had fallen in formless swathes of black, stifling the dusk. I drew the curtains, heard the rattle of a key, the slow fumbling for the lock. With unnatural precision I moved to the door and stood waiting. The front door opened and closed; those stranger's steps advanced. I counted them . . . six.

The fire leapt anew, lighting his face as he stood, framed in darkness before me, holding his hat and smiling. . . . Oh, that smile! Must all my life be terrorized with smiles? But nothing, nothing I had ever known of fear in the past, of cowed childhood's horror, could compare with what I saw in the flickering alternate light and shadow of that moment.

His lips, queerly swollen, were fixed in a pallor that looked like death. We had laughed together at that family of Masks and now *he* wore a mask, superimposed upon his features, grotesquely distorting, enlarging, destroying. . . . His eyes were like dark holes, filmed hazily, and through the haze he smiled, and through those twisted lips he spoke.

"'Lo, Weazel. Am I late?" He swayed.

"Yes, a little. . . . What. . . . ?"

I went to him, I touched him, reached up my hand for reassurance to his face that I scarcely knew for his own.

"Are you ill?" I whispered.

"Ill?" He took my hand, crushing it, gazing, "Not ill . . . tired. Why no light? Light the gas. Le'ss have light."

His speech was quiet, thick in his throat, as though a fog had choked it.

I took a taper and held it to the fire and watched the small white flame flare up. I lit the candles. The room sprang to life, full of known familiar things. Some instinct made me raise my face to his inhaling his breath. It was perfumed of cloves, and musk and violets, and strong of spirit; a sinister hidden odour underneath that false flippancy of scent.

He put his lips to mine and whispered: "Why do you stare at me? What've I done?"

I drew away. "Yes, what have you done? Where have you been? Take off your coat——" I helped him off with his coat, took his hat. "Sit down." I led him to a chair. He sat, huddled. I knelt, looking up at his stranger's face, sniffing at his lips again. "Very . . . like a weasel," smiled Jonathan. "Or—a terrier at a rat-hole. Eh? . . . Well, what have you found? What d'you see? What d'you think?"

"I think," I told him, clear, "that you've been drinking. You're strange and dreadful, and you smell."

Something stirred in the dark pools of his eyes, a lightning gleam, furtive, cunning. "Ho—oho!" His lips were drawn back in a snarling grin. "I'm dreadful and I smell. You think I'm drunk."

"I know you're drunk," I said, careful of my voice lest it betray my heart-beats. "I don't mind that so much. Perhaps your publishers gave you something and you're not used to it. You never drink."

He nodded emphatically. "Never. I've sworn it. They did give me something. The two of them. We sat there in the office and they oiled me with praise. Oiled. . . . I'm oiled now!" He chuckled. "They offered me double terms. Double. More than last. . . . If . . . *if* mind you . . . 'stip'lations. You un'erstan'? If I cut out the heart of it and the lungs of it ——" The brogue that I loved crept into his words, aching. "If I'd delete certain passages—you 'member? where he visits a brothel and finds a child there and loves her . . . he *did* love her from that moment. It was *his* moment. They . . . the low-minded scum, they saw only peep-hole cop-ulation. Something to be paid for at ten guineas a piece by dirty diseased old men, winking through peep-holes . . . an' I . . . and I said to them," his voice struggled for control, "I said I'd be damned before I'd change a word of it. I said, 'This is mine. I've made it. This is a living man, born of the living God that's in me. I've conceived him, borne him. You—with your niggling porno—pornographic sewers that can only hold a body's drainage, not its soul, choose to see in my . . .'" he stopped, with a gesture of his hand across his eyes.

I put my arms around him. "Darling . . . I know. I understand. Come back to me now. Don't be like this. Be *you* . . . I see . . . I see it all. They wanted you to mutilate your work. Is that it?"

He nodded, and taking my chin in his hand, put his lips to mine again, hungrily.

"And then," I whispered, with the taste of his drink in my

mouth, "you went out and had something because you were . . . upset?"

"I was," he said, "upset." And his eyes lowered and slid sideways. "But I've had nothing, nothing to drink. Nothing 'tall. Glass of sherry. Tha'ss all. I swear. I went round to see Dowson to tell him. He was thinking of publishing with these *canaille*. I said, 'Don't you.' I said, 'Don't you. They'll slay you,' I said. 'They'll take you by the . . .'" His tongue came out to lick his swollen lips. "'They'll cut' you up,' I said. 'They'll oil you first with flattery. Oh, Mr Rourke, you're quite ex-ceptional, Mr Rourke. You have ex-ceptional ability an' sensibility an' sense and all that, Mr Rourke. But be damned to you, Mr Rourke——'" he rose, staggering to his feet, raising his arm, "Be damned to *them*! I'm free. I'm a free agent. Nothing, nobody, no ——ing mealy-mouthed tripe machines can keep me from myself." He laid his hand on his chest; it crept upwards to his throat. "They'll *not* strangle me."

"Please 'm." Augusta was at the door, "dinner's in."

"Thank you, Augusta. Come and have some dinner, darling." I took his hand. "Of course you needn't let them publish it if they make you cut it about. You can take it to another publisher." And I whispered, on tiptoe to pull his face to mine, "don't be worried, not to-night, my darling. Not this of all nights. . . . Our anniversary."

"O' course," said Jonathan. "An'versary. I'd almost forgotten."

His hand went to his pocket. He drew something from it. A small flat leather case. "Here, for you."

I opened it.

"Oh . . . Jonathan!"

The loveliest thing, oval-shaped, enclosed in glass, depicting two tiny figures exquisitely enamelled against a faint blue background, starred with pearls. "It's French," said Jonathan, "*Dixhuitième . . . Louis Seize*. See the words scratched on its back." He turned it over, reading the almost illegible markings. "See? Ghost words from the past . . . '*Ma bien aimée de tout mon coeur*,' and look—look! The date. *Novembre dix . . . 1782*."

"I shall wear it always," I whispered, "all my life. . . ."

We went in to dinner. I had laid the table with silver dishes of bon-bons and flowers and fruit. Augusta had put the half-bottle of champagne on the sideboard.

"Wha'ss that?" asked Jonathan.

I smiled at him. "I thought a taste—for luck. But perhaps . . . let's drink it to-morrow instead. You don't like champagne, I know."

"Don't like?" That look came back to his eyes again. I shrank from it. "Not like?—who said I didn't? Who said——"

"Darling, don't!" He had taken the bottle, was fumbling with the cork. Augusta brought the oysters and stood staring.

"Put them down, Augusta, you needn't wait."

The cork popped.

"Gimme a glass," said Jonathan, "you—you Augusta—I loved you for that name of yours long ere we met," Augusta. Gimme a glass. No, not that one. A tumbler."

Augusta brought the tumbler, glancing up at him, wrinkling her nose, subduing a grin. Jonathan filled the glass, drained it at a gulp and returned the empty tumbler to her with a bow.

"Thank you. Now madam's glass."

She brought him mine. He filled it, drank, and paused. "Why, you have none! Here, drink the dregs. Drink. Drink!" He put the glass to my lips. I took it from him and the bottle that he held.

"No more," I said, "it's finished."

"No more?" His eyes blazed behind their shadows. "No more? That won't do. We must have more. Wha'ss half a bottle? Not 'nough. I'll go out and buy more. You—Augusta, child of—Cockaigne, you go out and buy some more. Go! Go!"

Eyes wide, lips pursed, she looked at me. I shook my head. "Run along now, Augusta, and eat your oysters."

She went, but I knew she was listening at the door.

"Then I'll go," insisted Jonathan. "The shopshs aren't shut. I'll get a magnum. I'm in the mood for drink. You've 'cused me of drinking when I haven't been drinking. Now I'm going to drink."

I held him by the lapels of his coat.

"Lemme be—let go."

"No, love, sit down and have your dinner. Look! Oysters!"

"No good 'thout champagne." His hands caressed me. "Little Weazel, do you like your brooch?"

"I adore my brooch. But . . . let us have our dinner."

"Yes. In a minute. I'm going out. Juss' for a minute."

He made for the door. I stood between it and him. I stood—with my back against it, holding his eyes with mine, forcing

a laugh. "No, you shall *not* go out. We're going to have dinner now."

His eyebrows lifted wildly. "Shall not? You say shall *not* to me? Who are you? Who in hell *are* you, to say . . ."

"Dear love," I whispered with a faintness, "don't, pray don't."

"I tell you I'm going out." His eyes were blacker now for the greenish pallor of his face, "an' if you say shall *not* to me I shall *not* come back." He approached me slowly. "Come away from that door."

Furtively, behind my back, I felt for the key. Thank God it was easily turned. I locked the door, took the key and held it hidden in my hand. He caught my wrist dragging me to him. "Give me that key," he muttered, "give it me." He twisted my wrist. I set my teeth, enduring. "Give me the key, or I'll . . ."

"No, no!" I whispered, "you'll break my wrist."

"Yes, I'll break it, and I'll break *you*, damn your eyes!"

And with that smile on his face he sang that song:

"And now we're going to hell, going to hell
And now we're going to hell, going to hell
And now we're going to hell
But what a . . ."

He broke off, grimacing on a laugh. "Give me that key, you bitch . . . little Weazel bitch that I adore." Agonizingly he pleaded, with all the sweetness of the world in his slurred voice. "My love . . . *mon amour, ma bien aimée*, give me the key."

"No, I can't," I said, under my panting breath, "I can't."

"You mean you won't." He dropped my wrist and raising his hands closed his fingers round my throat, digging with his nails, tearing at my flesh, in a thick beating silence. I closed my eyes, not to see his face wet about the forehead, his writhing foam-flecked lips. "You . . ." I managed just to whisper, "you're hurting me."

Instantly he loosed his maddened fingers; and as sight came back I saw him spread them out to look at them and then—he looked at me.

"Your little throat," he said in wonder, "your little lovely throat . . ."

All night I stayed with him in that locked room. He lay where he had fallen in a stupor on the couch. Augusta knocked at the door; I opened it.

"Mr Rourke is not well, Augusta. I am attending to him. We shan't want any dinner. You may take what you like of the chicken and the ice, and then go to bed."

Her eyes, dismayed and anxious, shifted from my face to his, sagging sideways on the pillow, his mouth a little open, his jaw a little dropped.

"Yes 'm," she said gruffly, fingering her apron. "Is there anythink I can do to help you?"

"No, Augusta, thank you, he will be all right now."

"Yes 'm."

She was staring at my throat. Her gaze widened: she gasped: "Oh 'm! Whatever 'ave you——"

"Please go to bed, Augusta."

Her lips stiffened. She set them firmly. "No. I ain't going to bed. If you want me I'll be 'ere."

"Thank you, Augusta, but there is no necessity for you to wait up."

"Please 'm," her rough hand came out to mine and touched it, "we 'ad one where I was before I went to Er, who useter—you know—sometimes. An' 'is missis she useter 'ave me up to 'elp 'er with 'im when he was took bad, see? Shall I help yer get 'im upstairs?"

"No, Augusta, you go to bed yourself." I forced a smile. "But eat the ice before it melts."

"Thenks. I don't fancy it some'ow. And what about them oysters? 'Adn't I better boil 'em? They'll go bad else."

"Do what you like with them—only please go, Augusta."

She took away the oysters and went, with a last look at him who had heard nothing of our whispers.

I examined my throat in the mirror. It was bruised and bleeding from abrasions. I dipped my handkerchief in the water-jug on the sideboard, bathed the torn skin and sat down in a chair to watch him till he wakened.

The clock struck six before he stirred. His eyes were slits of blue between his eyelids. I had never seen them bluer.

"What's this? Where . . . ?" He sat up. "Have I been asleep?"

"Fast asleep," I said, "I didn't like to wake you."

"What's the time?"

I told him.

"By Jove! I must have been tired, I can't remember——"

"You don't have to remember," I whispered, on my knees beside him.

He yawned, stood with a hand to his head very pale, pitifully young, with his silken hair tousled on his forehead, and that puzzled, sleepy, waking look of a boy. That's all he was, a boy. That's all he ever will be. . . .

"What," he asked, frowning down at me, "is the matter with your neck? It's all over scratches. I suppose it's that damned kitten. I told you not to keep it."

Thank God for the kitten that had strayed in upon us and that I had kept because it was black—for luck.

"Why do you let it claw you?" asked Jonathan. "You had better put some zinc ointment on those scratches. You don't want to get blood poisoning."

"I shan't get blood poisoning."

His glance roved the room in dazed uncertainty. "I've a most frightful headache," he muttered.

I began thumping the cushions on the couch, straightening the crumpled antimacassar. Better not have it out with him now, let him go to bed and sleep again. Later I would tell him exactly what I thought of him for the shock and fright he had given me—going out and taking what is called a drop too much. For obviously I saw now what had happened. Unaccustomed to anything stronger than beer, and little enough of that, he had taken a very big drop too much to excite his brain and scare me out of my life. I could have laughed aloud at my relief and at myself for making such a to-do about—almost nothing after all. Mike, I knew, often took too much to drink, and Mitzi scolded him. Yes, and I would certainly scold Jonathan: but not yet, not now.

"You had better go to bed," I said severely, "if you don't remember what happened I will remind you when we meet again."

"Meet——?" He seized my hand and swung me round to face him. "What are you talking about? Aren't you coming to bed?"

"I am certainly not coming to bed. It is nearly time to get up."

He put his arm round me. "Did we have a row, my Weazel? I seem to remember something. I was late . . . and you were cross."

"Very cross," I said, "and I'll be crosser."

His face became suddenly clouded. He walked to the window, pulling aside the curtains. "Here," he said, "it's morning. I

shan't go to bed now. Let's go for a walk on the Heath and see the sun rise from Parliament Hill. It is going to be a perfect day. Will you come?"

"Yes," I said, thankfully, "yes . . ."

You see . . . I didn't know. I *wouldn't* know, or knowing deep within me I preferred wilfully to blind myself rather than face the truth: or perhaps I was too ignorant, too young to realize the menace of the Thing that shadowed him and all our joy together.

That night was soon forgotten, fading as a nightmare fades, with no immediate recurrence of alarms. One fear alone possessed me: his refusal to allude to or discuss the incident. When later I mildly reproached him: "Darling, you know you really were dreadful . . . I don't know where you'd been or what you'd had to get into that state——"

He rounded on me fiercely. "What? What state? Are you trying to tell me I was drunk?"

"I am afraid you were. In fact you were so drunk that you——"

And again I could not tell him of that which he had done to me. I could not speak of it to him or to myself. So carefully did I avoid all memory of that last awful moment before his final lapse into unconsciousness, that I was ready to believe his own acceptance of the kitten.

"You *know*," I faltered, "you were drunk."

The effect of my words was startling. His face blanched; he raised his hands. I thought he was about to strike me, and I cowered.

"It's a lie—a lie!" he shouted. "never say it. I don't drink. And if you value our love you'll not kill it by your damnable insinuations. If——" his lids lowered in the narrowed furtive look that soon I learned to dread. "if I take a glass of sherry with a friend occasionally, that's another matter. I'm not used to it and it goes to my head. But I *don't drink*. Understand that once and for all."

"You don't remember then," I blundered on, "how you came home to me? You were——"

"I was not. Hold your mouth unless you want——"

He made an effort to regain composure; his eyes softened; he took my face between his hands and kissed my forehead, then my throat with little frantic kisses, whispering: "My sweet . . . my poor lovely sweet. Did I do this to you? Did I? Did I?"

Was it the kitten or wasn't it? I didn't do it, did I? If I did I'll kill myself. I swear . . . if I thought . . . You know I'd tear myself to pieces sooner than . . . you know that, don't you. Baby, don't you? And I want you to know this, too. That whatever I do or whatever I am, beast, devil, swine that I am. I love you. There has never been anyone else. There *can* never be anyone else. Without you I'd die. I couldn't live. You're everything—life and breath and God and everything. Bear with me. I know I'm not quite . . . not always quite . . . myself. I over-work. I write till I'm fagged out. But I don't drink. Not to excess. Ever. I swear that on my solemn oath. You do—you *must* believe me."

How could I not believe him? We loved and we were young.

* * *

Early in the New Year, Mimi returned to London to dance at the Opéra Comique. Jonathan and I went to the opening night of the ballet. She was even more wonderful than the first time I had seen her dance. I thought I detected a riper, richer, more dramatic quality in her interpretation of movement, but that may have been because she was dancing to Chopin. We had seats in the stalls. Mike, Mitzi with the Baroness, were in a box. Mitzi waved to us and beckoned in the interval.

"You go," said Jonathan, "I'll join you. I'm just going to the cloak-room for a minute."

I found my way to the O'Connors' box and was introduced by Mitzi to a very charming young Frenchman—the Vicomte something or other. Mitzi took me aside to whisper excitedly: "He and Mimi—you mustn't say I told you—it is a secret yet, but they are to be married."

"Mitzi! I *am* glad. He looks unbelievably romantic. Who is he?"

"A gr'eat artist—already famous and not yet thirty. You should see his pictures. He is the rage of Paris."

"Has she known him long?"

"Yes. I think—three—four years. She has refused two millionaires and half a dozen others for him. He has nothing. His family is the highest nobility but poor as mice. *Aber!* What matters? Mike and I have nothing and still love."

And I had tortured myself thinking that Mimi and Jonathan . . . This must be the young man of whom Mimi had once

spoken. What needless misery imagination can inflict! . . . There was no time for more talk. Mike interrupted to tell me I must go back unless I wanted to miss Mimi's entrance. He hurried me out of the box to my seat in the stalls where he left me. Jonathan had not returned when the curtain rose. Fortunately we had gangway seats.

I tried to fix my attention on the ballet but saw nothing of it. I remember only a confusion of white figures floating before my eyes, while minutes passed and still he did not come. I sat alone in the gloom of the silent house, isolate among a pale multitude of faces. Where could he be? Why didn't he come? He would come he *must* come. . . . I fidgeted with my programme, my opera-glasses slid off my lap on to the floor. I dived. A gentleman beside me stooped to recover and hand them to me. I murmured apologies and peering round to see if Jonathan were standing at the back of the stalls, I encountered the frowning stare of the lady directly behind me. I must keep still . . .

I adjusted the opera-glasses and focused them on the stage box. The profiles of Mike, Mitzi and the Baroness approached like faces seen in a darkened mirror. The young Frenchman was withdrawn, standing apart, his head turned towards the stage; Mimi's lover to whom she would soon be married. The orchestra was playing that most exquisite of all Chopin's waltzes, the one in A flat, written for his love . . . Love! What a desperate fatal fever was this love. None could escape it; even Mimi pledged to her art had been taken and possessed.

I turned my glasses to the stage. Mimi's body swayed while she danced, as a flower under water might sway to the pulse of the sea: she was not of the earth: she had never been more lovely. Behind their paint her eyes held a shy startled wonder. Poised on one toe she smiled up at her screened lover and reached out her hands to him. . . . I lowered my glasses and fear crept upon me. Where was Jonathan? Should I go and find him? Had he been taken ill? I half rose in my seat, and as I did so I saw him coming down the gangway. The lights from the stage blazed full on his face. He was smiling. . . .

He took his seat beside me, speaking loud. "God! She's marvellous! What a creature look! Isn't she marvellous? Bravo, Mimi! Bravo!" And with that swollen smile on his face he clapped his hands, foolishly chuckling.

I caught his wrist and held it fast. "Don't," I whispered, "don't."

"No, but look at her! I mean . . . look! What a . . ."

I dug my nails in his wrist. "Hush! Pray don't talk."

"What? Wha'ss matter?" His voice rang out above the music, cracking, slurred. "Why not? Why shouldn't I talk? Why the hell shouldn't I? Sit here like a dummy—in Paris you can't talk at the ballet. Not a fun'ral. Not a bloody fun'ral."

Through the stalls swept a shocked rustle of whispers. One of the programme-sellers sidled up. "Silence, sir, if you please."

"Who are you—tell me silence? I won't—silence." He stood, gesticulating. The white blurred faces of the audience, the white shapes upon the stage, revolved, converged and swam together in a grey mist before my eyes. I closed them for an instant, gathering strength to drag myself from my seat, pulling my cloak around me.

"Come," I said, "we will go now."

"I'm not going."

"Sit down!" yelled a voice from the pit.

In the O'Connors' box I could see Mitzi's head turn, startled.

The attendant had disappeared. I took Jonathan's arm. "Come along, we must go; I'm not well. Please come."

He suffered me to lead him out; heads turned to watch us. At the exit we were met by the attendant and a portly uniformed official. I spoke to him.

"Will you have the goodness to call a cab?"

He gave Jonathan a quick comprehensive look and nodded.

"Yes, madam. This way if you please."

"Wha'ss all about?" demanded Jonathan.

"I must go home," I said, "I'm feeling . . . faint."

"Don' wan' go home."

My fingers tightened on his arm. "You will if I want you to. Mind the step."

How strange that I could speak so calmly, with my heart a raging panic in my ribs. Still more strange to find him docile, obedient, like a child that has lost its way and trusts where it is led. He stumbled as he walked up the stairs into the foyer. There he halted. "I mus' get my cape."

I held him firmly. "The commissionaire will get it for you. Give me your cloak-room ticket."

He groped in his pocket, produced a crumpled rag of paper. "Here—though why the hell I——"

"Will you please take this," I told the commissionaire, "and find the gentleman's cape?"

"I dunno wha'ss all about," mumbled Jonathan. "Show's not over. Why go? If you mus' go lemme stay—see Mimi—why not? Get you a cab."

His lips were fixed in a twisted grin: his eyes were dead, quite dead. The commissioner brought his cape, the elegant raven-blue cape in which I had first seen him—a fashion started, I think, by Oscar Wilde, and followed by all the young elect of his day. The man helped him into it and handed him his silver-topped tasselled cane and his opera-hat. This Jonathan rammed on his head without opening it and laughed. "Bless me! I forgot——"

The commissioner, his face like wood, took it from him, opened it, handed it back.

"Thanks, thanks," said Jonathan airily. "Thanks . . . silly of me."

He put the hat crooked on his head, groped in his pocket again jingling money. "Here, my man." I saw the glint of gold. "call a cab for madam. A four-wheeler."

"Thank you, sir, there is a cab waiting, sir. Allow me, sir." The commissioner, enriched, obsequious, assisted Jonathan down the steps and into the cab. I followed and gave the man the address. I heard some altercation.

"He says, ma'am, he can't go all the way to Hampstead."

"Why the devil not?" shouted Jonathan. "Who the——"

I took his hand. "Be quiet. . . . Tell the cabman I will pay him double his fare but he must take us."

Another argument followed. The commissioner backed from the kerb. "Right, ma'am." The cab moved off. I released my bitten underlip with an ooze of blood upon it. Jonathan was muttering beside me; suddenly he began to sing tunelessly, on one note:

"And now we're going to hell, going to hell,
And now we're going to . . ."

"Stop it!" I cried, "stop it! I can't . . . you're killing me. . . ."

I clapped my hand to my mouth, fighting back the shrieking words. I must not give in, must not be weak. I must be strong for him, strong to fight this evil Thing that was his master.

"Don't sing, love," I said quietly, "I have such a headache."

"Such a headache?" He turned, and with infinite tenderness took me in his arms. "Lemme cure it, Weazel. I'll cure it." He kissed my mouth; his kisses tasted of brandy and cloves. "That better?" he whispered. "I'll love you when we get home. Shall I? Shall I?" His fingers fumbled at my bodice; I clasped and held them—"Please—I only want to be still."

The dimly-lit cab showed me his face, lips pursed, grimacing. "Sorry. Sorry. You don' want me, eh? I disgust you, eh? All right. All right. I know now. You hate me. You 'spise me. Drag me away when I was 'njoying myself. Why do you wan' go home mill—middle of ballet? I wan' go behind see Mimi."

"We can see her another time."

"No other time. May be dead. All be dead. Life's a sell, eh? a bloody sell . . . I say!" He began frenziedly to search for something in the dark of the cab. "I've lost my cane. Where's my cane? Mustn't lose my cane. Pat—my brother Pat gave me that cane twen'y-first birthday. Don' wan' lose my cane."

"The man brought it you, I saw it in your hand. Perhaps you dropped it as you came out of the theatre."

"Then it's lost. I mus' go find——"

He started up, bumping his head on the roof of the cab and was jolted back into his seat. "Goddam! I wan' my cane."

"It must be here——"

"It's not here! Mus' go back."

He opened the door of the cab.

"No!" I clung to him. "No! Stop the cab. You can't get out while it's going."

"Can't I? Why can't I?"

He wrenched himself free, jumped and fell in the road. I screamed to the cabman to stop. The cab pulled up. I saw Jonathan scramble to his feet, and called to him piercingly: "Come out of the road—you'll be run over."

He came to the open door of the cab, smiling, hatless, with dirt on his gleaming white shirt front and a smear of mud on his chin.

"You go on," he said, clutching his cloak around him, "I'll follow—I'm going back."

"No," I cried, distracted, "for God's sake! Let me come too."

"Drive on!" He waved his hand to the cabman. "Drive on, damn you!"

He banged the door.

I tried to open it, but it was stuck. I knocked on the window. The cabman may or may not have heard me; he drove on. I jerked down the glass. "Follow him—go after that gentleman."

"'Ere, mum," grumbled the cabman, "d'yer think I'm a bloomin' circus?"

"Please!" I cried, "please go after him, he is not well. Drive back to the theatre. I am sure he has gone to the theatre. We may overtake him. Go slowly."

As the cab wheeled round, something rolled on the floor. His cane! I saw its silver knob. Oh, God, help me to find him. . . . Drive faster. Faster. But I had told the cabman to drive slowly. I sat huddled, staring out of the window at the crowded pavements, filled now with the teeming night life of the city, straining for a sight of him I sought among the promenaders: young men in opera-hats, women of the town, the restless tide of human atoms hunting the subterranean growth of London's underworld—for what? For pleasure, self-forgetfulness, or some brief mad interlude of freedom from the dreary struggle for existence? "Drive on," I moaned, "drive on. Drive faster. . . ."

The cab came to a halt at last.

I got out and paid the man with a crown piece. He growled at me. "Take this then, it is all the silver that I have." He snatched it; I turned and passed into the foyer. The commissionaire, recognizing me, hastened forward. "Yes, madam?"

"The gentleman," I asked, "has he come back?"

"No, ma'am."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, ma'am, I've been standin' 'ere ever since you went."

"He thought he had left his cane, but he hadn't. . . . Oh, dear!" I remembered now that it was in the cab. "Would you mind seeing if the cab is still outside?"

He returned. "No, ma'am. The cab has gone. Can I call you another?"

"No . . . thank you."

I went out again into the Strand.

The ballet would be over very soon. If I waited near the main entrance of the theatre I could not fail to see him should he come. It had begun to rain, a thin soft drizzle. The shop windows lit by gas-flares exposed me to the full view of passers-by. The wind tore at my thin silk cloak, my train dragged in the dirt. No. I could not possibly stay here, I was too conspicuous. I hailed

a passing four-wheeler and told the cabman: "I am expecting a gentleman. He will not be many minutes. Can you wait just in front of the Opéra Comique?"

"Yes, missie."

He had a kind face: not all London cabmen were so hateful as that horrid beast who . . . A sob tore at my throat. I swallowed it and got in. The cab turned and pulled up outside the theatre. I was sure I had not missed him. He would surely be here soon. It would not take him more than a quarter of an hour to walk from Piccadilly Circus. . . . Ten, fifteen minutes passed. The ballet was over, the audience poured out, crowding the pavement. The cabman came to the door to tell me: "I shall 'ave to move on now, missie, to make way."

"Very well, then will you please drive me to the stage door."

It was possible Jonathan had gone behind to see Mimi. I inquired of the door-keeper, a surly individual sitting in a kind of glass cage, if a gentleman without a hat in a dark blue evening cape had called to see Maritzka in the last quarter of an hour or so. I was told that Maritzka had given orders that no gentlemen were to be admitted to her dressing-room to-night.

"But—has *no* one called, no gentleman at all?"

"Seein' as 'ow I know my dooty," returned the man sulkily, "no one can pass this door without my seein' 'em."

"Thank you."

I went back to the waiting cab. What to do now? O God, what can I *do*? . . . I told the cabman to drive me once more to the front entrance. It was closed: the last of the audience had left. A darkened blank confronted me.

I called to the cabman: "Can you take me up to Hampstead?"

"Yes, missie."

There was nothing else to do but to go home.

Augusta had cut some sandwiches and put out a bottle of ale for Jonathan and a glass of milk for me. I turned up the gas and knelt by the fire, holding my hands to its warmth. I looked at the time. Half-past twelve. How long would I have to wait? . . . I do not know how long I waited, sitting there in the quiet, listening for sounds. Twice I went out, straining through the dark for the gleam of a cab's lamps, the rumble of wheels. Nothing. Unutterable blackness and a silence that drained all echoes from the distant city, lying coiled like a twinkling snake in the ruddy haze of light far below Hampstead's heights. A night bird screeched from the grove of trees before our house.

I shut the door, shutting out that cry, so like the voice of a soul in pain, and returned to the firelit room. I sipped some milk; I nibbled a sandwich. I prayed: "Let him come soon. Let him not drink. Keep him safe. God, don't let him be drunk, don't let him be drunk. . . ." Over and over again until my whispers frightened me.

I watched the hands of the clock creëp round. Each five minutes was an hour and yet five hours passed before I heard the jingle of a hansom's bells and flew to the door holding it open. The cab drove up and stopped. The cabman climbed from his seat.

"Kerm on, sir. 'Ere y'are."

It was too dark to see more than an indistinct blur of two figures that seemed to be one. I heard again that heavy helpless drag of feet on the gravel path and the cabman saying: "Kerm on, sir, pull yerself together. 'Ere's yer good lady waitin' fer yer, see? Can you manage him, mum, or would you like me to lend a 'and?"

"If you would be so kind."

Between us we got him through the narrow hall into the room and on to the sofa. I received impressions with the cold incurious detachment of a person who has been given a local anæsthetic. I could observe myself and him as though from another state of consciousness, each sense acutely tuned yet mercifully numbed beyond all feeling. I saw and did not see his lost, white face, the loose lips, those dead half-shut eyes, and the young heart-breaking tendrils of his hair: only his hair remained unaltered; a boy's hair.

I offered the cabman the bottle of beer left by Augusta for Jonathan.

"Thank yer, mum, I shan't say no."

He was a cheery red-faced fellow with a violent squint and a hearty growth of whisker. His presence relieved the nightmare tension of the moment: his face emerged from the formless layers of that stifling dream, alive, refreshingly solid.

"Thank you——" How queer to hear my voice coming out from the top of my head. "Thank you for your assistance. It is very good of you to drive so far—so late."

"Well, mum, I couldn't 'ardly leave 'im, could I?" The cabman drained his glass and set it down, fixing me with one eye while the other roamed the ceiling. "Findin' the pore young gentleman laid out—so to speak."

"Where," I asked, "did you find him?"

"Down by the Embankment, 'E was talking to 'imself and waving of 'is arms—'bout three o'clock that was. I'd been watching 'im for some time and then suddinly 'e fell forward flat on 'is face and laid there. I got down to 'ave a look at 'im—fair paralytic 'e was, mum, and a copper come along and we searched 'is pockets and found 'is card-case. I thought the cop would be for runnin' 'im in, but I expect 'e thought better of it, seein' the name and knowin' 'im for a proper gent. 'Best get 'im 'ome,' he says ter me, so 'ere we are. I'd let 'im sleep it off if I was you, mum, and give 'im a couple of prairie oysters when 'e comes to."

"A couple of what?"

"Raw eggs beaten up in Worcester sauce, mum. It'll bring 'im round a treat."

"Thank you very much. Please take this for your trouble."

I gave him a sovereign.

"Thank you, me lady. Much obliged I'm sure."

"I am much obliged—to you," I said. "Good night."

I watched him go, heard the cllop of hoofs, the gay jingle of the hansom's bells as he drove off, and stood, my face uplifted to the waning moon. The darkness seemed to shudder as though a chill had struck it: the stars were hidden and a veiled greyness came. It was the dawn.

X

THAT night and other nights, the weary long succession of wakeful dawns and days eclipsed by shadows, passed and narrowed to a constant prayer. I knew no peace, no joy in love despoiled: yet I think that in our shared or unshared torment I loved him more. I could not love him less for what he was, for all he might have been.

He fought; how desperately he fought, only I could know who watched his bitter war against the secret desolater of our lives. That this was no mere feeble self-indulgence I well realized, grown wise in my perception to match my wits to his that had sharpened with the cunning of his malady; for malady it was, to scourge his mind and plant within his soul the poison of unslaked desire.

I had learned to know the signs between each bout. He would be irritable, restless. His nights were haunted; he would wake screaming from the terror of his dreams and turn to me for comfort. . . . I guessed, not from anything he told me, for he would never tell –when I tried to make him speak he shut me out –but I guessed how during our first year together he had believed that he had conquered and was saved. I guessed, too, that the anguish of his disillusionment, fallen lower in his own esteem, was a further torturing penance. Yes, he fought. I'll swear to that. I watched his struggles, pitiful and terrible, unaided. This was my curse, that I could give no help. He would not open out to me; always he denied and lied to me, hid from me, hiding himself.

His book published in the spring of '89 –but not by his first and better publishers, for he refused to make the alterations they demanded –was doomed to failure. The critics damned it without the faintest praise. It sold less than five hundred copies. Those carping reviews served only to increase his trouble and killed all hope for the book.

And now for the first time in my life, for the first time I think in his, we found ourselves at a serious loss for funds. I had to pawn my mother's pearls to pay the rent. We had a joint banking account and during those stricken months of his immersion he drew heavily upon our dwindling resources, I well knew for what purpose. I taxed him with it once . . . but once only. He left the house and was gone for two days and two nights. A policeman came to tell me . . . I had to bail him out.

There was never any sign about the house of the Thing he craved. I searched methodically in his absence and found nothing. I had no notion where he went to drink the deadly stuff, but he never drank in my presence or our home, though he brought the evil shadow of it with him, to lodge there in our lives. It sat, an unacknowledged guest, between us, at our table: it lay in our bed and shared with him my body, mocked at our love with sickly tainted lips and barren seed. . . . And the pity of his young boy's face grown weary, aged: the wonder was that he still kept his youth, his naïve abandon in those moments, rarer now, when he could throw off the insatiable thirst to be himself again: to laugh and play with me, to read aloud the poems that he made, even when the Thing had come upon him. Almost his best work was done on the crest of the wave, while his brain excited by false stimulant, soared into realms of fantasy and wrote itself out before the blank intolerable interludes of his relapse. His eyes never were so blue as when he woke from those dark hidden hours; his features moulded to a cameo clearness, his voice richer, more tender, his caresses more fervent, his love all and always mine, no matter to what godless unknown shames he was ensnared. . . .

It became increasingly apparent that I must earn a living for us both. I began to practise during the time when he was gone; and how often he was gone only God and I remember, and until this moment I have chosen to forget.

I studied the advertisements in the *Times* and *Morning Post*, as a result of which I applied for a situation as a daily governess at a house in Ladbroke Grove. My interviewer, a stout, flashy woman with much rouge on her face, many rings on her fingers and a mass of dyed yellow hair, received me in her dressing-gown. Her look was hostile, her manner rude.

"How old are you?" was her first question.

I told her.

"You look about sixteen. Take off your hat." And when

I obeyed she glared at me as though I had committed an offence.

"I have two girls of thirteen and fourteen. I have recently remarried," she informed me. "I will tell you frankly—my husband is a trifle younger than myself. I think under the circumstances I would prefer an older woman. You are too attractive——" Her eyes swept me from top to toe, "and too well dressed for a governess. I don't want anyone here who thinks herself too big for her boots. I should expect you to do a certain amount of light housework in the afternoons, and of course all the mending. Can you sew? You can't?" She rose. "Then I am afraid you will not suit the post at all."

I said I was very glad to hear it, and marched out seething.

I answered several more advertisements, always to be told I was too young, and when in desperation I added five years to my age, it was very evident that I was not believed.

Then one day I saw in the *Times*: "Young Lady Pianist wanted for Ladies' Orchestra at Select Tea-rooms. Hours three to six p.m." The address was High Street, Kensington.

I wrote for an appointment and received a prompt reply on note-paper headed 'The Mikado Tea Cosy,' requesting me to call the following evening, and signed N. Pinnock (Miss).

Determined to overcome the defects of my youthful appearance, I dressed myself in my old mourning black and bought a matronly bonnet trimmed with bugles and a black chenille spotted veil. Thus disguised I felt I might hopefully say I was thirty.

N. Pinnock (Miss) proved to be a lively brunette with a preponderance of bosom, a roguish eye and a high colour. She interviewed me in a tiny parlour behind the tea-room—so overcrowded with knick-knacks, photographs, Japanese fans, aspidistras in coloured pots and dried grass in gilded vases, that there seemed to be scarcely no place for the two armchairs either side the hearth, and a gate-legged table laid for two with a bottle of wine and a box of cigars upon it. No sooner was I in the room than Miss Pinnock commanded me to lift my veil. Then, with a nodding of her head and a crinkling of her eyes: "As I thought," she said, "just a kid. When they're young they put it on, when they're old they take it off. How young are you, dear? . . . You needn't tell me."

I took a liking to her instantly.

"You know, dear," she said, "this is quite a new venture on my part. Quite. I used to be in the licensed hotel trade, but

after falling out with my late employer—a very nice house at Brighton it was—over a slight difference of opinion—but never mind that just now—I decided to launch out on my own. Tea-rooms are becoming all the rage, as you possibly know, but they are mostly in the West End. So I said to myself, look here, Nellie, I said, it's no good setting up in opposition. What *you* want is to get in first—in the semi-suburbs. Kensington High Street, I said, that's the place for you. My aim was to attract a nice quiet ladylike clee-on-tell and I think I've done it. We've been open six months and we're already quite a well-known little ronday-voo for lady shoppers. Though we do have one or two gentlemen habitews—but nothing, dear, that isn't as it should be. I'm *most* particular. No private rooms, no nooks and corners and *no* screens. I won't have screens. I don't stand for any nonsense. All my girls come from nice respectable homes, but I *do* insist they wear kimonos. Then about three months back—in February it was—I thought to myself what we want *now* is a little livening up. Music. No sooner said than done. That's me all over. I never beat about the bush. If I want a thing I go straight for it like a bull at a gate." And she laughed so very heartily that I had to laugh too, and could almost see her charging—her magnificent bosom out-thrust at any gate that might be in her path. "And now where was I? Oh, yes—well, I put an advert in the *Times* and *Post* for three young ladies, musical. Piano, violin, and 'cello. I had them all within the week. And then, dear, would you believe it? Just as we were nicely settled in and making quite a little name for ourselves with our music three to six, my piano comes and tells me—a nasty trick to play me, dear, that was—that she'll have to leave because—" Miss Pinnock wagged her head and pursed her lips. "Oh, married, dear, of course," she hastened on. "Quite all right in that respect, only she might have *said*. I'd noticed she was careful of her dress, very bunchy in the front, and then she had the sauce to tell me she'd only taken the job for a few weeks so that she could earn a bit of extra to pay for her lying-in, her husband being out of work. They all say that. So I was nicely bothered, I can tell you, and of course I couldn't let her stay because in her kimono she was already beginning to show. And now, dear," she paused for a breath, "what about you? Can you read music at sight?"

"Yes," I said, "I can read anything at sight and play anything by ear."

Miss Pinnock nodded approval. "You're not married, dear,

by any chance? I only ask because I'm not going to be caught twice."

"I'm afraid," I gasped, "I am, but I don't think I—I'm not likely to——"

"Well, dear, you never *know*. You can't have been married very long." She gazed hard at my figure. I blushed.

Miss Pinnock rose from her seat.

"Come along then, dear, and let me hear you. I don't play myself but I'll know if you can—or you can't." And she led the way into the empty tea-room. It was indeed very select and almost overpoweringly Japanese. The walls were plastered with fans and patterned with pagodas and chrysanthemums; scarlet-painted shelves exhibited dwarf gardens, grinning masks, dolls, jars of paper cherry-blossom and papier mâché dragons. The floor was covered in matting, the chairs and tables were bamboo. At the farther end of the room, screened by a hedge of potted palms, had been erected a small platform on which were crammed an upright piano with ribs of pleated silk, two music stands, three chairs. Two young women seated at one of the tables rose as Miss Pinnock, with me, very small at her heels, advanced. "This is Clara, dear, the 'Cello, and Fanny, the Violin. They have obliged me by staying to accompany you. Now, girls, get out your music, we'll have 'The Mikado.' We always begin and end with a selection from 'The Mikado.' One on the house, so to speak." And she laughed her hearty laugh again to shake her bosoms.

Clara, the 'Cello, opened the piano and placed the music for me. She was tall, thin, anæmic, wore spectacles, and looked an enviable thirty. Fanny, a handsome Jewess with black frizzy hair and wonderful eyes, was about my own age. Both were dressed in their outdoor clothes; Clara in shabby grey cashmere and a straw 'boater,' Fanny in red sarsenet, a display of imitation diamonds, and a fly-away black hat trimmed with roses and white ostrich tips.

The piano, of a make unknown to me and sadly in want of tuning, was no worse, in fact a little better, than I had thought it might be; Clara's playing adequate and assured, but entirely devoid of tone; Fanny's an agreeable surprise. She was undoubtedly gifted and brought warmth and vigour to that cheap adaptation of Sullivan's score, to which I added some elaborations of my own. We were not, however, half-way through when Miss Pinnock, interrupted: "That's enough—very nice, very

nice indeed. And now, dear, will you oblige me with a solo?"

I gave her the Hungarian Rhapsody, to be stopped again: "Fine, dear! That's fine. Quite a professional touch. You'll be playing at St James's Hall one of these days, I shouldn't wonder."

"How you must have worked to get that technique," remarked Clara, in a voice as toneless as her playing.

"Don't be silly," Fanny said, "it's born in her. My word! What a treat. Go on, ducks—finish it. I love that Rhapsody."

"No, dear, not now," said Miss Pinnock, "some other time you can have a musical after hours all on your own and play what you like——" she looked at the clock—"only I've a visitor coming to dinner in a minute, and I want to have a word with Miss—I've forgotten your name, dear—or Mrs, I should say. We haven't fixed terms." She patted my shoulder. "But I don't think we'll quarrel. You'll do."

I was late getting home that evening to find Jonathan in a rare state. Where had I been? What did I mean by rushing off like that without a word to him? I had noticed, and with what relief, that he had not been drinking for some days. He was so much himself again that I dared think him, if not cured, at least in part recovered. While we dined off cold mutton and pickles I told him of my interview and its result. He took it hardly. He would not, he declared, allow his wife to make a show of herself—no, he saw nothing funny in my description of the place or its *patronne*. How did I know she was not some bawdy old procuress? She sounded very like it to *him*, and as for parading myself in a kimono before a parcel of tea-swilling crumpet-munching females—and males, too, he had no doubt—Good God! Had I gone mad?

"Not yet," I retorted, "but I shall if I have to worry myself sick making ends meet. It will only be for a while—just until you get your next dividend." His father had left him a small income of about two hundred a year, but he was already overdrawn to a good deal more than that amount.

"You don't realize a bit," I went on, roused, "how difficult it is to run a house on nothing. We are both a pair of idiots about money, but I am a little less of an idiot than you. Do you suppose I *want* to look at every penny, though you're quick enough to spend the pounds. Do you suppose I want to dress up in a kimono and—and—bang a piano in a place

called The Mikado Tea Cosy? Yes, you're right! It isn't very funny, after all."

This was our nearest approach to a quarrel: we never quarrelled, for even in his blackest moments I knew it was not he but his possessor who spoke through his mouth, words that he never remembered. And now, behind my obstinate annoyance I felt a swift revulsion of gladness that he had taken this decisive attitude on my behalf.

He said: "It's frightful. I can't and won't agree to it. That's positive. I won't let you work for me. What the devil do you think I am? A pimp?"

"Listen," I sat on the arm of his chair and stroked his hair back from his forehead, noticing with a pull at my heart the tracery of blue veins on his temples, the too-transparent skin, tight-drawn across the frail cheek-bones. Could his physical strength, I wondered, withstand the steady onslaught of the enemy? "Listen, love," I said, "this isn't work. It will be a pleasure—a hobby for me. I have nothing to do here at home when you are out all day. I have so few friends——" None, since I had left my father's house, except Mimi, and her I seldom saw. "And when you're out I miss you. You've been away from me so often lately."

His eyelids fluttered; he tapped a foot impatiently. "You know perfectly well I am reading at the British Museum."

"Yes, I know that." I think it was true. He did read at the Museum—sometimes.

"And how much," he demanded, bitingly, "are you going to be paid *pour épater les bourgeois*?" And when I told him two pounds a week—"So," he uttered a short laugh, "I'm to let my wife go out to work for two pounds a week! I used to spend more than that at my florist's—in buttonholes."

"Yes," I said, "and it's just *because* you used to spend that we've got to stop spending now. It won't be for long. Your next book is going to be a great success, you see if it isn't. I feel it in my bones. Don't you remember you told me the first time we met I was a witch?"

He leaned his head against the chair-back looking up into my face. "Why don't you let me go? I'm no good to you. I'm dragging you down with me—you who are made for all in life that's lovely. I ought never to have taken you. You're such a baby . . . and I . . . I'm . . ." his boy's mouth quivered: his eyes were wet. I kissed them whispering:

"If only you'd let me help you. If only you'd let me share. . . ."

He jerked his head from under my hand.

"What do you mean—share? We share each other's lives."

"Do we?" I urged. "Love, be honest. . . . Do we?" Perhaps now he would reveal himself, turn to me with full confession, seeking my aid to reinforce his fight against the enemy. Now, now, I willed him silently, tell me now. . . . And for one pregnant moment I could almost hear the words that seemed to struggle upwards from the depths of him to die upon his lips . . . *'Yes . . . help me. Only you can help me. I'm drowning . . . drowning.'* But his eyes, his lips were closed, the words remained unuttered. He said tiredly: "You're being just a little tedious, my sweet. You make me almost inclined to agree with Oscar's theories about marriage."

"And what might they be?" I asked, sharp.

He waved his hand. "Many and diverse. However, I will give you one of mine: the only happy ending to a romance is to leave it unfinished."

"I see." Truly, then I would have gladly hit him. "You are trying to tell me you regret your marriage?"

"No," smiled Jonathan, "but I regret my love. A man can be happy with any woman so long as he doesn't love her. And that's not mine, that's Oscar's. . . ."

So would he shut me out behind a hurting cynicism, as false to his whole being as the poison that induced it.

And presently he left me, and went . . . where I could not go.

* * *

I was careful after that not to allude to my tea-shop activities. The hours were conveniently short and by arranging to have dinner at eight instead of seven I was always home in good time. I left our cottage every afternoon at two o'clock and had to walk two miles to the bus terminus at Swiss Cottage. The way in those days led through fields.

I did not find my work a hardship. I liked Clara and Fanny, and I think they liked me, but I never saw anything of them outside the Mikado. Fanny lived with her mother, a widow. And Clara—I knew very little about Clara except that her father who was a member of the Philharmonic Orchestra, had

first taught her to play the 'cello, and that she had eventually gained a scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music.

I was thankful that as the pianist, my back was always presented to the audience. None could see my face, and even when occasional perfunctory clappings indicated that a few at least had listened and were demanding an encore, I did not turn with Fanny and Clara to bow.

What agonies of self-consciousness I suffered in a bright pink kimono embroidered with storks, and in my hair two yellow paper chrysanthemums. By a tacit understanding the waitresses, although similarly attired, did not associate with the ladies of the orchestra. They knew their place, we knew ours, and Clara was for keeping it. "Just as well, dear," she said, "to keep ourselves to ourselves. If you give those sort of people an inch they'll take an ell. After all, we *are* a cut above." Sometimes I rather wished we were a cut below. I would have liked to have known the waitresses. There was one, a slender, dark-haired girl, with almond eyes and a creamy olive skin, who even in her shoddy cheap kimono had a certain grace and quality. I always smiled at her and received slow secret smiles back: she had hands like brown lilies. I remarked to Clara once that I thought her very pretty. "Pretty?" cried Clara horrified. "Good gracious, dear, she's a half-caste. Her father's a Chinaman. He keeps a restaurant in Limehouse. Miss Pinnock engaged her because she looked so much the real thing."

She was now more than ever mysterious. She reminded me of that poem by Gautier. Did she, too, live with her old parents *'dans un tour de porcelaine fine ou sont les cormorants?'* . . .

Strange how trivial contacts such as these remain when more obstructive elements have vanished. I see her now going silently about her small concerns, a phantom figure, faintly tinged with magic.

Then, one day, after I had been at the Mikado about a month we had just finished playing the overture to 'William Tell' and I had risen to search the pages of my music for the next item when Fanny whispered across to Clara: "There's that toff again at Flossie's table." Flossie was the incongruous name of the Gautier girl. "My word! He's a fine-looking chap, though, isn't he?" She nudged me. "Look!"

Through the thicket of palms that screened us I could see without being seen. I looked and saw—Hugh Titterton.

He must have recently returned from India. His face was

burnt a fierce brick-red, his hair bleached almost white at the temples. He screwed his monocle into his eye, consulted the menu and beckoned.

"Bet you anything you like he's after Flossie," Fanny murmured. "See? I told you so."

The girl had glided to his table and stood taking his order. He was gazing up at her with that hot, gloating look I well remembered. I saw his lips move soundlessly, and an almost imperceptible tremor cross the girl's face; her dusky colour deepened. He raised his voice, said loudly, "China tea, please, and cakes."

"Cakes!" giggled Fanny under her breath. "Trust him to have his cake—and eat it, too. She'd better mind out. Old Mother P. will be down on her like a load of bricks if there's any monkeying around. Not that *she* can talk—with her gentleman friend to dinner every night. What some men'll do for a free meal and a threepenny cigar!"

And watching him whose wife I might have been, a queer emotion seized me; so remote, so utterly divided did I seem to be from that distant life on which he had encroached and which lay behind me now, a far receded shore. It was as if I had returned from another incarnation to a forgotten, baser plane. What if I had let myself be taken, had drifted on a tideless sea of cheap veneers and false securities to be cast up, stranded on a lost horizon? . . . Yes, I had been spared complete disintegration. I had chosen, I had changed my fate; no matter what of spirit's sorrow, pain or punishment I might yet have to meet I would at least have touched reality, have known fulfilment, the shared delight of mind and body, dear comradeship and those great purifying passions that lie beyond desire or regret. . . .

The girl had come to him again in answer to his gesture; his eyes devoured her, his lips moved in silent speech; hers, soft-coloured, answered with a reluctant, slow unfolding. I wanted then to cry to her a warning. It was one of those unpremeditated moments when the most outrageous impossibilities may be conceived—a vulgarism shouted loud at some polite assembly, or a blatant truth hurled with defiance in the face of social lies, or it might be an act of frenzy—the urge to throw oneself out of a window or under an oncoming train; and as always in such moments, when, between a second and a second, one perceives a thread-like glimmer of escape from the fogged obscurity of

habit, when vision lightened, hovers on a crisis of suspense, to know, to see the secret of things hidden, the seizure passes and the door is closed. . . . My impulse died with Fanny's whisper: "Look, he's going now. Bet you he'll be waiting for her round the corner when she comes out."

"I hope not," said Clara, "it will give the place a bad name. The girls here have always been so naive. Pass me 'I dreamt that I dwelt,' dear, will you?"

That was a week of surprises. A few days later I came home to find a private hansom at the door and Mimi in the parlour.

She told me she had finished at the theatre, and wanted to see me before she left London. Mitzi had given her news of me and my address, and was it true I was playing the piano in a tea-shop? "My poor little Jenny! Are you really so hard up?"

"Do you suppose I should be doing that if I were not?" I answered, smarting under her light mocking tone. Her quick glance hovering about the room came to rest upon my face.

"Ah, well! You have love—in a charming cottage. I would like just such a cottage—lonely on a peak in Paris! I would like," she said, "a home."

I looked at her where she sat curled in Jonathan's chair, her dress of palest green sheathed round her closely; a wide-brimmed hat held her eyes in shadow.

"But you——" I began and stopped myself in time. Mitzi had told me that Mimi's approaching marriage was a secret. "You can have a home," I finished lamely, "if you want it."

"A home?" Her voice rose shrill, metallic. "My home is the stage. I can have no other—and that is all my world. It is not true that each man in his turn plays many parts. Once you are cast as leading lady, *première danseuse*, or what you will—you stay always in that part, there is no escape from it. The stage director—ballet master—he pulls the strings to make us dance to *his* tune. I must not change my part and play at housekeeping. No! That is not my *genre*. I must dance for ever till I drop."

She removed her hat, passing her fingers through her black silky hair; her face was colourless. The artificial shading of her eyelids accentuated the fevered brilliance of her eyes.

"Mimi," I whispered, "is anything wrong? You look so ill."

"Do I?" She jabbed the pins she had taken from her hat into the crown and flung the hat on the floor. I picked it up. "I am desperately tired." And when I murmured, "Yes, it must

be a great strain on your strength—dancing every night——” she turned on me sharply.

“Don’t cluck! You *cluck* like a little hen. Do sit down, darling, and leave off staring.”

I sat, holding her hat, smoothing its ribbons, and, carefully avoiding looking at her, I heard a rustle of silk, the clink of a chain. “Do you mind,” she asked, “if I smoke?” From a gold chatelaine at her waist she had detached a flat gold case containing cigarettes.

“No—of course——” I jumped up to search for matches.

“These——” she said in her smiling voice, “are a very special brand, slightly flavoured with opium.”

I turned. “Mimi! You surely don’t——”

“*Mon dieu!* You are easy to tease. Does Jonathan tease you?”

I lit and held the match to her cigarette. Her lashes were dark crescents on her cheek; she lifted them. “You, too,” she said, “look ill. Your eyes are much too big and much too deep, and your skin is so fine one would think a touch would break it. . . . Well?” She sank back into her chair, gazing not at me but a point above my head. “Do you wonder why I have come to see you? Why I have waited a whole hour for you here? Me—who will not wait for anyone—not even for my love. What a funny little maid you have. She offered me tea. I said, ‘No, thanks, but I will take a good strong cognac.’ You should have seen her face!”

I felt mine redden. “I am sorry we—we never keep any drink in the house. We—don’t drink.”

Her eyebrows lifted. “Is that so?” And making an O of her painted lips she blew a smoke-ring; it widened, floating, drifted into nothingness. “How like one’s life that is,” she murmured, “an unbroken perfect shape and then—gone. Not even a whisper to tell of it. Jenny——” she paused; her eyes were dipped in darkness, brooding, and in that same light casual tone she said: “I have come to you to-day to show you myself. I have no one to whom I can show myself. I—who show myself to all the world.”

The tip of her cigarette was stained with crimson from her mouth; such a soft dewy mouth, like a red flower. Each time I saw her she seemed to grow more beautiful. If I were an artist, I thought, I would never let her out of my sight. . . . “Least of all can I show myself to Mike and Mitzi—those two nearest to me. They have their own picture of me. It would be cruel

to spoil it. Jenny, I am sick—just a little sick—of myself.” Her upper lip folded on her teeth in a queer tight smile.

I leaned towards her. “If there is anything I can do to help—if you’re in any sort of trouble——”

“Darling! How sweet you are with your big sorry eyes, ready to take me into your arms—such thin little arms—opening out to offer your protection to me—and the baby.”

I looked at her steadily. Her lip uncurled. “No, my dear. I am sorry to have to disappoint you. That theme is worn to rags. Besides, I am too careful of my figure. No—I simply came to tell you I’ve been—I believe the word is—jilted.” And watching my face, she asked irrelevantly, “does my smoking shock you? Then perhaps you would like to join me?” She offered me her case. I shook my head.

“I have never smoked a cigarette. I don’t think I should know how.”

She nodded, smiling. “Very right and proper, my dear, as befitting a little old matron. We are both getting on in years, aren’t we? Quite a couple of hags. I shall be twenty-two next birthday, and you will be twenty-one. Yes—you are a matron and I am—a whore.”

“Mimi!” I caught my breath, “don’t . . . pray don’t.”

“Ah, now I *have* drawn blood. You’re shocked. I told you I had come to talk about myself to you, my little friend, whom I have known all my life. We first met in our perambulators. Did you know that? I didn’t, till Mitzi told me so the other day. She was wheeling me out in Kensington Gardens and she sat on a seat next to your old dragon of a nurse and they began to talk about their babies. And you and I talked, too, in our own language from our prams. I wonder what we told each other then. Did we compare notes about our lives to come? We live so many lives in one . . . Jenny, of all the women I have known, you are the only one that I can really like. You I like because you are kind and honest and in your little secret soul you are an artist; and that is why you suffer and will always suffer, *chérie*, for the artist must pay penalty to art. But beyond all this I like you because you are brave. Yes, I think that you are brave. You are certainly brave to have married Jonathan. We will talk of him presently.”

And then she fell silent, and I looked deep into her eyes, and saw behind their armoured glitter the hurt of an open wound.

“Oh, Mimi,” I whispered, “Mimi.” I had no words to give

her, only my heart of pity and that was not her need. And presently she raised her head and dragged that thread of a smile to her lips.

"I thought I could tell you a long story, make a romance of it, cry on your shoulder—yes, cry like women do and as I don't. Do you know I have never cried since Mitzi wrote to tell me Punch was dead? Do you remember our old dog Punch?"

I nodded.

"I have not cried," she said, "since all those years—oh, yes, I have forgotten. I cried the other day when I read 'Black Beauty'—such a sad, sad book about a horse. I can cry for animals—they are so much lovelier than humans. Some women cry for pain—I mean ordinary physical pain, but I cannot. Once a porter banged the door of a railway carriage on my fingers—the pain of that was agony, but I didn't cry. And now I haven't cried a tear although—" her lilting voice with its faint foreign inflection hesitated for a moment and resumed—"although all is gone from me, my life, my love, my home. . . . I, too, had bought a home, *our* home . . . a cottage similar to this high up on Montmartre with a garden looking down on the roofs of Paris, almost in the country. I furnished it ready for us before I came to London, with lovely old French stuff and an Empire bed . . . I have always wanted an Empire bed. A friend of mine—not so much a friend as you, but quite a friend, has made a fortune on her Empire bed. Perhaps I, too—" her eyelids flickered, "if you're shocked don't listen."

"I'm not shocked." I took her hands and held them, "I'm listening to you, not to your words."

"We were to have been married," Mimi whispered. "How cold your hands are, darling, and so small, like a mouse's hands. Do you remember Mouzel's hands, how sweet they were? He used to hold them up as if he were saying his prayers. Do you ever say your prayers?"

"I say my own prayers, Mimi. Nothing that I've been taught."

"You're not a Catholic. I am. I must go soon to confession. I have not confessed for weeks, though no priest can give me absolution for *my* sins. . . ." She threw away her cigarette and took another. "I said you needn't listen, but you have a listening face, my Jenny, such a kind listening face, and those big swimming eyes of yours . . . I spoke of him to you, didn't I, when I was here in London for my *début* two years ago. Do you remember?"

I remembered: when she lay in her great white bed and talked of love and lovers. . . .

"I think I told you then that there was someone."

And I thought she had meant Jonathan.

"He belongs to what the English call 'Good Family.' That is to say he has a Name but no money. Oh, yes, he earns a little with his pictures, but I earn more. I have enough for both. The French, particularly the French *noblesse*—they make a god of money. His family think nothing of his art. That is his amusement as I am—or was. How quickly the present turns into the past. . . . He has a terrible mother. I saw her once. She sat in a stage box with her lorgnette fixed on me that I felt I was one of Pasteur's germs under the microscope. I felt she was examining me like that—watching me wriggle, cutting me limb from limb, weighing each particle of flesh—do germs have flesh? But my dear, an ogress! And strong! The strength of these mothers. It is almost an incestuous love they have for their sons: or perhaps I give her too much grace to call it love. I think it is no more than snobbery—*noblesse oblige*. Maritzka is no wife for the Vicomte D'Auteuil—even though my ancestors were chiefs in Ireland—or perhaps I try to blame her for his fault. *Enfin ! . . .*" She opened the front of her bodice and drew from it a folded paper. "This came from him last night. We were to have been married next week, in the church at the top of the hill where Mitzi and Mike were married. They were coming over with me to-morrow, too. It would have all been quite correct." She laughed her shrill high laugh. "Wait, I will read it to you." She glanced down at the letter in her hand, her lips moved soundlessly following the words before she translated, "He thinks now upon reflection that marriage between us would be wrong for me and him. He is in fact now married to his cousin. She is very rich. It must," Mimi said, smiling, "have been arranged when he was here to see me dance and he had not the courage to tell me. Letters are easy to write. I think his mother wrote it for him. He says, 'it is a marriage of convenience and will not detract from the arrangement of our ménage. We can still have our cottage in Montmartre. You see how easy it will be—I will have my wife, and can still adore my mistress, the two will never meet and all three will be happy.' . . . But that is so naïve—so French!" She rose from where she sat to strike a match from a box on the mantelpiece. I watched her light her cigarette and then the letter in her hand: and as it flared she flung it in the grate. "So

much for that!—and that is all! A not uncommon *histoire* and one that might be told by any little kitchen-maid, only that the kitchen-maid would have the inevitable baby. I have been spared that—although there was a time when I was even imbecile enough to think—to hope—that I might one day have a baby like any other woman—or a wife.” I saw her mouth quiver and tighten. “Me with a baby! It would be made of sawdust, a marionette! So that, my dear, is what I came to tell you, and God knows why I did.”

And she would let me give her nothing though I ached for her, and when I tried, how clumsily, to tell her with futile words and my voice a cracking whisper, “Mimi, perhaps it may be for the best. After all you’re young—and famous——”

“Don’t say it,” she interrupted harshly. “Don’t smooth me down with platitudes. Don’t tell me that I have my work—that I’m Maritzka, known in all the capitals of Europe—because I’m not. Don’t tell me that I’ve been the mistress of the Czar, because I haven’t—yet. Nor of Leopold of Belgium, although he’s on the carpet—a *coup* to come. Perhaps. Or I might aim higher, to the most high of all. Our Prince of Wales. He has already sent me bouquets . . . or should I say *your* Prince of Wales, for I belong to no country. Yes, that is true, I don’t. I was born in Paris of an Irish father and an Austrian mother, so who or what am I?”

She fastened her bodice that gaped where her letter had lain. “Forgive me, Jenny, for coming here exposing my sores like a whining beggar. I loathe self-pity more than anything in the world. Self-pity is the meanest form of cowardice.”

“Yes,” I said, “but you are no coward, Mimi. I have sometimes thought that we are never given more to bear than we are fitted for. I think God—I do believe in God. Do you?”

She paused before she answered, “You may ask me that question when I have come to the end of my life.”

“I will,” I said, “if we are together at that time. But, Mimi, what I want to say—it may not help, but I do think suffering is perhaps a kind of test to make us better. Stronger. Wiser. I think those people who have never suffered anything—perhaps can never feel. And I am sure that none of us is given a burden greater than we can carry. The heavier it is, the more it hurts, the better—in the long run—maybe.”

She put her hands on my shoulders to gaze at me searchingly. “Has life already taught you so much, or do you like

to indulge in flagellation? There are some who find a pleasure in it, yet you speak with such a sadness. Is that sadness all for me?"

I dropped my eyes from hers that had grown warm and tender.

"How you must love him," she said on a breath, "to have married him knowing. . . ." Her hands tightened on my shoulders. "Did you know?"

"Know what?" I drew myself away from her in sudden quiet.

"I see," she said, "you know."

"You mean," I answered, clear, "that Jonathan drinks too much sometimes. Yes. I know that."

"Poor Jenny," Mimi murmured, "and poor Jonathan. How cruel of life to give with one hand and steal with the other. To give him beauty and a first-class brain, and you . . . and dipsomania."

I felt a greyness closing round me, and heard my voice, a thin cry breaking through it: "What word is that you said?" My fingers gripped her arm. "That word! Say that word again. What do you . . . what does it mean?"

And seeing my trouble and caring for it to forget her own, she told me what it meant and what she knew of him and of his craving. She had seen it in others. It attacked, she said, always the most charming, the most sensitive. . . . Some of the greatest poets, Alfred de Musset, Verlaine, they, too, had been addicts. . . . Yes, they were incurable. "But he, your Jonathan, is young, there might be hope. You should consult a doctor, one who specializes in such cases. There must be doctors here who understand. . . ."

I think she went on talking, but I heard only the repetition of that word. It had burned into my brain and stayed there, branded.

* * *

Through the long silent hours I waited for Jonathan's return, but my vigil was now more full of hope than hopeless fear. In my fever of impatience for the morning I could not go to bed. I sat there thinking out what best to do. Mimi had said, 'Consult a doctor' I would. I would go to the public library, obtain a medical directory and find Charles. I would tell him all and ask his aid. 'If ever you want some cousinly advice . . .' He would

never be my cousin, but I knew he was my friend. I would take myself and my life's tragedy to him and trust him with my love's salvation.

The clock struck five; another dawn had broken. I dared not let imagination wander to rouse in me heart-quaking alarms and vile fantasies, and so impede my thought of him who strayed, lost in his affliction. Always I tried to send myself wherever he might be with strength to guard and prayers to keep him safe. And strangely in the midst of all my agony of waiting and suspense I never doubted; no matter when, or to what abysmal maze he had descended, I knew he would return.

I made myself some tea, drank it in the kitchen, drew up the blinds to find the sun in heaven and the birds at song. I went into the garden. Each upturned leaf, each flower trembled with drops of light; my feet left smudges where I stepped on the dew-spangled grass. Over the Heath the grey-white wings of early mist spread and melted in the joyous morning gold. A marvellous sweet day it was: still and empty of human sound, with nothing but a lark high up and the far-off murmur of a city roused from sleep to break the quiet; and all that sprawling vast expanse of Cockney common, untenanted save for unseen tramps, who, coming and going out of London, sought shelter in gorse-brimmed hollows under the stars.

Presently, while I stood there at the gate, I heard the step that soon or late I knew would always come, and ran to meet him as he toiled up the hill walking wearily as a man who has walked far.

I halted wondering, filled with tempestuous relief to see him in possession of himself, until I saw his face, mercilessly revealed in the sharp sunlight like the face of one dead, and his eyes shadow-haunted. I called to him and stood there in his path. He stared, focusing his sight with that young dazed look of his so like a little boy waked from some frightening dream, that my heart fainted with love and pity for him and his broken youth.

"You . . . up already?"

His voice came pinched between his stiffened lips. He had emerged from his obliteration and would remember nothing. He might give me if I asked for it, an explanation of his absence: some thin lie that it were better to accept than to induce a brain-storm by rejection. For in the aftermath of his recovery I had learned to humour him, dreading the gusts of rage, whether

half-feigned or not I never knew, with which he sought to justify himself before me—or his soul.

I took his arm. "It is such a lovely day, I couldn't bear to waste a minute of it."

He darted me a veiled glance—and glanced away. "Waiting up all night for me as usual, I suppose? Are you going to nag? For I warn you now that I won't stand it."

"Do I ever nag?" I asked him quietly.

"Not so much in words as in your look—of a little smug angel." But he pressed my arm against his side to soften the sting of that, and we went up the hill together and came to our home.

His chin showed a faint gilding of bristles, his lips were parched and stained, and on the lapel of his coat was a white smear of powder.

I gazed at it stupidly. Now that he had come, was safe, unharmed, exhaustion claimed me. My mind, dulled from want of sleep, could not clearly register the meaning of that mark, though somewhere deep in me I knew, and, knowing, did not care. Let that be the least of it. I feared no woman of the kind who followed him along his secret ways.

"I must have a shave," said Jonathan, and left me.

Augusta was up and at her work. "A nice turn you give me," she announced, "when I found your bed not slept in and no one in the 'ouse."

"I couldn't sleep so I went out," I told her. "Will you take Mr Rourke his shaving-water, please?"

"Yes 'm."

She said no more: all was understood between us without words.

Jonathan was in the bath-room when I went upstairs. I sat at my dressing-table before the little old mirror we had found in an antique shop in Heath Street. In the age-dimmed glass my face, greenly pale, shrunken, hollow-eyed, floated before me as though disembodied. I leaned my aching head on my hands and prayed obscurely: Let me find Charles. . . . I must find Charles. . . . And I think that for a moment I lost consciousness for the sound of the opening door was loud with a jerk to my heart.

He called me in a whisper. I turned, my eyes drawn to his that smouldered in his racked, quivering face.

"I'm lower than I thought," he said, "I've tried—and

am found wanting. I'll have to try again."

And then I saw. His right hand held a razor: his left dripped crimson drops and the edge of his cuff was red.

I could not think nor speak, but my mind, though locked, functioned automatically to close with him in a grim blind struggle for that open blade. And how I captured it I do not know, but I got it from him and ran with it to the lavatory and dropped it in the pan and pulled the plug.

He had followed me. "I am not fit to live," he said, "not fit to touch you. Is that my blood on your hands—or your own?"

"Only a scratch," I said. "Come let me bathe and bandage you. Oh, my dear . . . my dear. . ."

He said with a smileless laugh, "And now I'll have to buy another razor. Curse! I'm bleeding all over the floor."

In the bath-room I washed his wound and bound it with strips of clean linen. It was a deep cut but nothing that would not soon be healed. He had missed the artery.

"I tried," he said, "to kill myself. I tried to cut a vein. Once before I tried to do it and I failed. I didn't cut deep enough. I couldn't do it. I'm afraid to die, and more afraid—to live."

I sat on the mahogany border of the bath and looked at him. His eyes now were startlingly blue, the pupils contracted to mere pin-points; then his mouth crumpled like a child's, and he knelt and laid his head in my lap, circling his arms to hold my body that I could feel the shuddering of his.

"What have I done? What have I done to you, my poor sweet love? What have I done to myself?"

I put my lips to his cool hair.

"It is not you," I said, "who does these things."

His arms strained me closer, he pressed his face against my thighs. "I know. I know. . . . It is because I try to find myself that I lose myself so often. I thought I'd found myself in you."

"I'm here," I told him, "always, and all yours."

A groaning sigh escaped him. I heard his tears. "I can't . . . can't let you suffer with and for me. Let me tell you what I have to tell, and when you've heard be done with me. For ever."

"Tell me," I whispered, "everything. Nothing you can tell and nothing you have done can make me love you less."

Then, his face still hidden, he poured out his broken, stumbling confession—of a room—"A ghastly room that stank of cheap scent and was full of frightful pink cushions and a bed. I don't

know how I came to be there or who she was. . . . But I woke . . . I woke to find her beside me on that bed. She was horrible. Obscene. She touched . . . she pawed . . . she slobbered over me. God! . . . I think I tried to throttle her. I heard her yelling and felt her nails clawing at my face and I let go. She began to shout her gutter filth calling me every foul name she could think of. I threw some money at her and rushed away. I was sick outside in the street. Sick with disgust and loathing of myself and her. Poor devil, I suppose she can't help being what she is. Who am I to . . . ? Well, then I walked. I must have walked for miles . . . I don't remember. Will you believe . . . " he raised his head. "will you believe me when I tell you that what I did and if I did it . . . is not I? I *don't remember*. That's what makes it so awful, to think I've touched that filth. . . . I can't delude you. I can't smear you with her slime. I did wrong to marry you. I'm no good to you. I can only give you shame."

I took his ravaged face between my hands. "My poor love. My dear. My husband." And I kissed the tears on his closed eyes. I kissed his mouth. "You have given me one year of all the happiness I've ever known. All I want and all I ask is that we may be happy again. As we shall be . . . if you will hold no secret that I am not allowed to share. . . ."

On a breath I said it, dreading lest I say one word too much to make him shut me out. But he came closer, burrowing his face in my neck like a child that seeks comfort.

"Whatever I am, whatever I may be," I heard him say, "I love you. . . . I love you that I want to die so you may live as you *should* live, my darling, with all the joy and all the loveliness of life that should be yours. I didn't think it possible that I could love you more, but this hell-night has shown me that I do."

"Oh, Jonathan, I, too. . . . I love you more."

We were silent, our pulses beating one against the other; and a warm flood of thanksgiving overswept me to leave me weak and empty of emotion, but calm now and sure of my way. He had opened half his heart to me and that was half the fight—already won.

* * *

I left him sleeping, had a cup of coffee and a bath, and went out to find Charles. The address given in the Medical Directory was in Queen Anne Street.

A man-servant opened the door, and to my inquiry if Dr Mallett could see me without an appointment, he replied uncompromisingly that he thought not. I handed him my card on which under my married name I had scribbled 'Jenny-for-short'; this I told him to take to the doctor, whereupon he grudgingly admitted me to a reception-room on the ground floor whose sole occupant was a bald-headed gentleman afflicted with a tic.

I thought that Charles must have advanced considerably in his profession to have achieved in so short a time a foothold if not actually in Harley Street--next door to it. The room fairly bulged with success. I sat at the table that was covered with newspapers and periodicals and tried to concentrate on a year-old copy of *Punch*. A grandfather clock struck twelve and the fidgety gentleman muttering "God bless me!" got up from his chair to stand at the window and beat a maddening tattoo on the pane; then returning to the table he took up the *Times*, set it down and staring hard at me began rapidly to blink, with so violent a twitching of his nose and grinning of his lips, and clearing of his throat that I felt much relieved when he was called to his consultation. Two fashionable ladies followed him to wait their turn, and it was half-past one before Charles, and not his servant, came to fetch me.

And there was I in a flutter, with all my apologies stuck on my tongue and nothing whatever to say. But Charles said quite enough for both of us and with such a breezy heartiness and patting of my hand and how very glad he was to see me, that I was encouraged to believe he really meant it.

"You seem very busy," I ventured, when he paused. "I didn't expect to find you here so grand."

"I didn't expect to find myself here, either. Yes, it is a trifle grand--rather too grand for me, but it's one of those things that happen. A dear old friend of mine died last year, and left me his house and practice, so now I divide my time between east and west. After all the sick are sick, whether they're rich or poor, though I do admit to a weakness for Stepney. And now what can I do for you, Mrs ----" he glanced at my card in his hand--"Mrs Jenny-cum-Jonathan Rourke?"

"I have come to consult you professionally," I said. "I know I ought to have asked for an appointment, but it is rather urgent."

"I can give you," Charles glanced at the clock, "three-quarters of an hour precisely. Have you had luncheon? . . . Then you

must have it with me, such as it is. I only take sandwiches in the middle of the day." He pulled the bell and gave an order to the servant at the door; and saying briskly, "We'll talk as we eat," he led the way to his consulting-room.

He had not changed at all except that he had perhaps a trifle stoutened, but still retained that same young look of a lion cub, the same untidy shock of hair and that laugh at the back of his eyes.

He placed a chair for me confronting him at his desk with the broad light from the window full on my face. And there I sat, struck dumb, twisting my hands in my lap, and dropped my eyes from his that saw so much. And seeing how it was with me, he began to talk of this and that and of himself, and how he was now specializing in diseases of the nervous system, leading up with casual reference to the last time we had met, and how he had visited Phœbe again and my old nurse at Crowthorpe, and, "I am glad," he said, "that you broke with Hugh. It needed some courage to do it."

"But more courage," I answered, "to marry him."

Lifting an eyebrow he nodded.

"I suppose," I said in a little voice, "that his family think very badly of me?"

Charles smiled. "I have not seen Hugh since he married. I hear he is the father of a pair of bouncing boys, and has just returned from India."

"Did you hear that I had married someone else?" I asked him. Yes, he had heard that too, and, "There is not much I haven't heard to do with you," I think he said, but the man came in at that moment to place a table at his side with sandwiches and a decanter of sherry. When he had gone out again, Charles filled a glass and handed it to me.

I shook my head. "No, thank you."

"I insist," Charles said, "that you drink this."

My hand shook as I raised the glass to my lips, spilling some of the contents on my dress. He got up and carefully mopped my bodice with his handkerchief.

"The first time I ever saw you," I said, "I spilled champagne on me and you dried me with your handkerchief—like this. How very queer things are——" And I did feel that things were turning very queer indeed with the room in a waltz and the window in a curtsey and Charles taking the glass from my hand to say: "Steady—put your head on your knees."

I couldn't quite put my head on my knees, fastened up in whalebone and laced and tightened as I was—and as all of us had to be—but trying to made me feel better, to assure him: "I'm not ill. . . . I'm not here because *I'm* ill."

"No, not yet." And his bright quick gaze was on me like a lamp. "It is surprising how the mind will supply the necessary fuel when the body's store is overdrawn. There comes a time, however, when the store runs out, and both stoker and stokee become exhausted. So drink up your sherry and eat one of these—and then you can tell me all about it."

And I told him all about it, losing myself in the recital of words I never thought to speak aloud; words released at last from behind the shutters I had closed on this, the tortured secret of him who was my life. Nothing now was hidden. I laid bare the whole pitiful story from its beginning. I went back to the time when I had followed him from that tea-shop to wait outside a public-house until he came. "And I did not realize—how could I realize that it was more than any man might do on a moment's impulse?"

"And if you had known," said Charles, "you would have married him just the same."

It was a statement, not a question. "Yes," I said, "I would have married him."

He gave me his straight clear look.

"You love him very deeply."

"And he loves me," I whispered, "but this thing is striking at us both, to kill. I have come to know if you can save our love . . . and him."

His chair scraped on the parquet as he rose from his desk. My eyes followed him where he stood with his back to the fireplace, his hands under his coat-tails, gazing, above the slight protuberance of his waist-line, at his toes. On the mantel-shelf, squarely seated on an ebony base, reposed a gilded Buddha. Something in the calm remote expression of that sculptured face seemed to be reflected in the face of Charles. And presently he raised his head, and spoke: "I can't promise to save your love—or him, but I can promise that I'll try."

"I trust you," I told him, "absolutely."

He wrinkled his brow. "My dear, I'm not a wizard. But if it is humanly possible to restore this man of yours to sanity——" and while he paused I groped for that word with a twist in my throat and a faintness to repeat it.

"Do you mean then that he is . . . ?" There I stopped. I could not say what in my heart I feared.

"On the contrary," Charles took the word from me to throw away and tread on it. "I have not the least doubt that he is far above the average intelligence. But the disorder that excessive alcoholism produces, *is* a form of mental instability. You must face that."

I drew a breath and faced it.

"It is not everyone," said Charles, "who can become an alcoholic. Morbid emotional depression or the desire to escape from the irksome trivialities of ordinary life, which to the ultra-sensitive are always unreasonably exaggerated and dramatized, tend to induce the craving for alcohol or any other drug that may enhance the self-importance of the individual, and surround him with a highly-coloured image of himself. Your true alcoholic is almost always a supreme egoist. What you have told me of your husband's attempts on his life—both of which have failed—bears out my theory. Such attempts almost always fail. If they succeed it is an accident. The personal ego is too pronounced to allow its self-destruction. Controversially, there is no lack of physical courage in the face of danger. I have known many dipsomaniacs—don't be afraid of these medical terms: your husband is an ill man and we are out to cure him—I have known many dipsomaniacs perform the most surprising feats of bravery. They are often, too, very fine fellows, worthy of the best in friendship—and in love."

And listening to him while he stated in his cool judicial voice my husband's case, the dread and horror of it lifted, and with my sight uncovered I recognized this thing for what it was: no shameful degradation but the disease of a sick mind—a disease that must be cared for, treated, cured.

Then at his desk, Charles asked me certain questions, made some notes and briefly sketched the course of treatment he proposed, giving me fully to understand that there must be no trickery in his approach to Jonathan.

"He must come to me of his own will and with his own *desire* to be cured. I could very easily ingratiate myself with him in a dozen different ways—not as doctor but as friend—only to shatter his faith in me when he discovers I have forced a back-door entrance to his confidence. I don't want to assert *my* authority, but to enable him to assert *his*. Only he can fight this battle for himself. I can supply the ammunition, that is all. You must

send him to me, Jenny, if he will be sent. If not, I will visit him, but in no false capacity. I am not his policeman—to forbid. I offer him myself as an alternative—that he may turn to me instead of to his secret haunts when his trouble comes upon him. And now ——” Charles took my hand, and held it warmly, looking down into my eyes. “now go, my dear, and tell him what I’ve said.”

XI

So step by step did Jonathan begin his long ascent, alone but not unaided. He who had sent him forth on his crusade armoured in faith and hope, stood behind to offer reinforcement against each fresh attack, and to spur him on to further effort when he fell.

I had been prepared for a fierce reaction against medical advice, but when I recounted word for word my interview with Charles, he listened without interruption till I had no more to say, and then, "If you think," he said, "that I'm worth saving—I'll be saved."

It was in this chastened mood he came to Charles; and what took place between them at that first encounter I never knew; and all Jonathan would tell me was: "We talked about hunting most of the time. He seems a decent sort of chap. The only medico I've ever met who has a sense of humour."

So far, so good, in that he had not refused admittance of a stranger to that guarded territory where none before had been allowed to tread. Charles had told me it would be difficult to check his progress or retreat. The most one could expect in these early stages of approach was the genuine desire for deliverance. One must realize, too, that the shock he had received when he woke to find himself in an unknown woman's arms, had been sufficient to terminate one cycle. Other cycles must inevitably follow.

Others did, with dreary repetition, when he would sink again into those sunless chasms from which it seemed impossible that he could ever reascend; yet he ascended, to return with dogged perseverance to the fight.

Of which to me he never spoke. Throughout those bitter months of struggle he stayed shut within his fastness, as one who hides some physical deformity for shame to show himself. Nor did I attempt to encroach on his preserves. They were his

own and not for me to trespass. I had passed responsibility to Charles. He alone had power to penetrate those barriers; and through the black recurrent weeks when life became a desert, and hope a mirage fading to despair, I was upheld by him who watched beside me, whose hand outstretched in the darkness guided when faith had faltered. It was only on faith that I lived.

But, gradually, it seemed the intervals between each bout had lengthened. At first it was a matter of a week, or two or three; then summer passed and autumn came, and Jonathan was still himself and busy on another book with no thought but that to set him brooding, while the ghost of his torment faded from his eyes that were blue with the light of his boyhood again. And once more it was as it had been with us in that first cloudless year of our marriage.

I dared not hope the enemy was for ever vanquished. Charles had warned me I must expect relapses. "But that he has unburdened himself to me," he said, "is half the battle."

I never knew and never have known what soul-searing confessions emerged from their obscurity under that steady analysis, which long before the day when science had discovered the meaning of the word, was turned as a search-light on those shadowed valleys. I never knew, for Charles never told; I knew only that he who sought him did not seek in vain. How often they have sat, those two, long into the night while I, in my bed in the room above, listened to the drone of their voices. Sometimes it was Jonathan who sustained the talk in a long unceasing flow; sometimes I heard him pace the room, his voice raised loud and wild to make my heart thump to bruise my ribs, and always the voice of Charles, crisp and clear, controlled him, and the talk would go on again. Sometimes they walked for hours on the Heath under the moon, and I would listen for their steps to return, hearing them part at the gate where Charles' brougham waited. Sometimes I would be asleep when Jonathan came to bed, for I could sleep safely now.

It must have been somewhere about this time, in the spring of 1890, that Jonathan persuaded me, much against my will, to give up my work at the Mikado. He had written and sold a short story to be published in one of those mushroom quarterlies, forerunner of 'The Yellow Book', launched on the tide of the *fin de siècle* and wrecked by the Yellow Press.

Fin de siècle. . . . What an era of experiment, of action and revolt against the apron-string moralities of Victoria. Now,

those fetters swept aside, youth, hot in pursuit of life, shouted its new freedom to the house-tops. The old sobriety of thought had run amok in the hedonistic passion for adventure. The New Decadence croaked its swan-song on the pallid lips of minor poets, to be drowned in the trumpet-call of the New Age. The world rode out on bicycles; the New Woman appeared in bloomers, the New Man in a red tie. Youthful under-graduates joined the Fabian Society; undergraduettes the Franchise League. Jonathan, caught by the tide, read Marx aloud to me, that for all I understood of it might have been Chinese, and wrote a pamphlet called 'The Crucified,' sub-titled 'Life and Labour.' This though it went the round of each new periodical remained unpublished; which may perhaps have accounted for the startling swing over, when for want of sterner audience, he harangued me for an hour to declare that Socialism was the menace of the future, the beginning of the end of the world as we had known it, and that our present civilization was collapsing. So man cried then, as man cries now, and as he will continue so to do till he cries Wolf too often.

Jonathan made a great talk of it, striding up and down the room while I sat in the window-seat with a pile of mending at my elbow.

"Every so often in the evolution of mankind, a new element appears. Two thousand years ago that element was Christ—the first to preach the socialistic creed. And had that creed been followed instead of being mangled, stoned, distorted by fanatics, *this* revival of Socialism would have made men gods, instead of which all vestige of original truth is lost in original sin. Greed. Yes—they'll all melt in the same pot. There's not a pin to choose between the capitalist and the working man. If you bereft the one of power the other will snatch his weapon from his hand. They, in common with all organic matter called humanity, crawling on the face of this atom in the universe, our earth, are doomed to explode in the most gigantic upheaval the world has ever known. And the first cause of it is Progress, and its name—Juggernaut. The internal combustion engine."

I blinked at him. His thoughts leapt far ahead of his words, and he was over the next hurdle and away on a new track, leaving me to flounder in a ditch.

"Yes, my girl," he pointed a long finger in my face, "remember what I say, for you may, though I shall not, be here to see it. The science of mechanism will uplift—to destroy the

human spirit. Capital and Labour will be welded in one to make of man a mechanical puppet, moving at mechanical speed, at mechanical command, to tear the bowels from the earth and the stars from the sky, and hurl God from His heaven to war with the Devil in hand-to-hand fight. *Deus ex machina*—with a vengeance.”

Those words of his seem now to be prophetic, though I did not at the time give much heed to them. I was accustomed to similar extravagance of speech which he would vent on me, usually as the prelude to a fresh outburst of writing. He could express himself more clearly in the written than the spoken word, perhaps because he toiled with unfailing patience at each phrase, not only to illuminate his meaning, but to give quality and balance to his prose. He had that rare capacity for concentration, which I had always lacked, and which above all superficial talent is the secret of success.

And then, while I sat there darning his socks—and how badly I darned to give him blisters on his heels, for I was never any use with a needle—he turned on me with typical inconsequence to say: “As for you, I am revolted to think of you rubbing shoulders with that rabble in a tea-shop, to disgrace my name and family and forget your caste. If the world *is* sliding to destruction, we should at least endeavour to wear over our skins the hair-shirt of the hypocrite—respectability.”

And who, I retorted, nettled, was he to talk of family and caste—to say nothing of respectability? He, who had repeatedly assured me that the British aristocracy was utterly effete and fit only for the lethal chamber. “And the way,” I said, “you keep chopping and changing—how can one possibly keep pace with your ideas? One minute you’re all for brotherhood, equality, and the British working man—he is the pearl cast to the capitalist swine—and the next minute we’re all machines. It’s always the same with you writing people. You talk but you say nothing. Most of you write nothing, either. Just strings of daft words.” And I tugged at a thread of darning-wool which promptly tied itself into a knot, and with my patience spent on that, I went for him. “As for your family—who of your family would ever lift a finger to keep you from the work-house? Not your brother Curraghmore, who apart from offering you a hunter when he knows you can’t afford to hunt, would have you starving in the streets for all he cares.”

“Yes,” said Jonathan reflectively, “by Jove, yes. I had almost forgotten. He did offer me a hunter. I’m half a mind to wire him to send it over right away. If I can’t afford to hunt, I still can ride.”

"And who, pray," I asked him with a snake in my voice, "is going to pay the stabling?"

"My pen," said Jonathan, "will pay the stabling. The day of literature is done. You spoke a truism, my child, just now, of which you are unaware. We do string words—and to no purpose. We scoff at the giants of the past who will remain immortal when we are maggots, putrefying in our own misbegotten tripe. We scorn our betters and strive with paradox and epigram and pictures of Dorian Gray, to epitomize sensation. To what cesspools are we sunk! However—I'd sell my soul most willingly to Fleet Street for a horse."

"I've sold mine already," I said, "to pay the rent. Do you think I love to bang on a tin kettle till my teeth scrape?"

"Which," drawled Jonathan, "is precisely why you will give in your notice this very afternoon to that old moll of yours."

I gaped at him.

"You—said?"

"You heard what I said. I've told you once before—I'm not a pimp."

"Oh, to hell!" And at his feet I threw his cobbled sock, sucking my pricked finger. "Take and darn it yourself. Who do you think is going to pay the rent if I give in my notice?"

He stood, his hands in his pockets, jingling coins and looking at me with a very irritating smile. "How you do harp on the rent. I am bound to say I find it somewhat tedious."

I told him he'd find it more tedious still if we had the brokers in.

He made feint to be shocked.

"Dear child! How vulgar."

"Vulgar, it may be. The vulgar truth. And you can talk till you're blue but I shan't give in my notice."

"Will you not?" He stooped to pick up the sock and, holding it as though it were a viper, dropped it in my work-basket. "Very well," he murmured, "since you choose to disregard my wishes I must be at pains to enforce them."

"Oh, yes," said I, nodding. "Enforce. Indeed. You will *force* me. And how, pray, do you propose to set about it?"

"Shall I tell you?" he laughed gently. "I'll put you to shame in front of those tea-drinking ladies that you'll wish you have never been born. I will call you aloud before the whole twittering assembly—can you fancy them poisoning their tea-cups to listen to the tale and float it into legend from Kensington to Putney Heath by way of Westbourne Grove? 'Mesdames,' I will say for all to

hear, 'do you perceive at that piano a small brown performing rabbit? She, mesdames, you will hardly credit, is my wife. I have come to fetch her away, for her place is the hutch.' You think I am joking? I'm not." The mischief died out of his face. "Nor am I entirely invertebrate, though I admit you have reason to think so. I feel my spine stiffening of late in a curious way, which, of course, might mean I am growing a tail—evolving backwards as it were—but I'm not yet your ape, nor your fool. And I'm telling you now, if you refuse to do what I wish—I swear on my oath that I'll make you. It's time I worked for you, my dear. You're not going to work for me."

Then he kissed my mouth hard and for all I made faces and stormed at him, protesting overmuch—no, I would not be ordered and threatened—do this and that just as *he* pleased. All very well—but this hellish rent and who or how or what and all the rest of it—deep in me I felt a shouting gladness to thank God. For surely this assertion that he must be my master meant that he was turning master of himself.

So to Miss Pinnock, not that very day, but soon enough, I took a long face and tale of excuses that I was needed now at home with my husband ailing to be nursed, and I spun it out before her in her little back room till she stopped me, pointing to a chair. "Sit down, dear, don't be standing—if you're that way."

"Oh! But Miss Pinnock, no—indeed." For this was dreadful.

She leaned forward to pat me. "Come, dear! Between married women—or as good."

"But truly, Miss Pinnock, that's not the reason. I'm not—"

And heaven send I shall not be, I said, within, which seems the worst of all sins that a woman's prayer should be for no child by her husband. Yet that is what I prayed; for Charles, when I asked him, had told me, Yes, the taint can be inherited to give predisposition, even if the parent has been cured.

But Miss Pinnock was nodding very wise, and knowing. "I quite understand, dear; quite. It never rains but it pours. There's Flossie Chang—don't let it go any further—falls down in a faint one day last week—and no mistake about it. I'd had my suspicions with her wearing the sash of her kimono back to front. I told her straight, 'Flossie,' I said, 'you're a fool. This comes,' I said, 'of disobeying orders. No followers allowed is the rule here. I'm not setting up to run a bawdy house'—if you'll excuse me speaking plain, dear. 'There's no flies on me,' I said."

And her bosom righteously swelling, Miss Pinnock resumed, "She's a deep one. Sat there, slant-eyed and smiling, brazen as you please and dumb as an image. I'd have slapped her face for tuppence. Yes, and I'm pretty sure who the johnny is. Some masher she's picked up in the West End. He's been hanging round her ever since last summer and dropping in here for his tea. Tea!" Miss Pinnock repeated with withering scorn, "he's the sort to want more than his tea and a ride on a bus for his money. I know," said Miss Pinnock, "I've seen him."

I, too, had seen him, and if thought could have flown with the weight of my fury to strike, he'd have been a dead man.

Miss Pinnock stared. "For gracious' sake! You're hot as cinders, child. Don't take it to heart—that girl's not blindfold. He's not the first, believe me. You needn't waste your pity. As a gentleman friend of mine always says, there's some born to go wrong, some never *will* go wrong—and that's not their fault—but their misfortune—and some have wrong thrust upon them. But whichever way you look at it, and what I always says is there's two sides to every face. I've lived a bit longer than you, dear, and I've learned a thing or two, and one of them's this—when a girl takes the wrong turning she's not always in blinkers. No more is Flossie Chang. She'll end right side up, don't you worry! St John's Wood for her and the baby out to nurse and a nice little income—on and off."

And having settled Flossie's future with an assurance that I thought was not entirely devoid of envy, Miss Pinnock, turned with due formality to me.

"And when, dear, are you expecting?"

"Miss Pinnock," I said firmly, "I am not expecting. I can stay with you with pleasure till you're suited."

"That, dear, I shall never be," declared Miss Pinnock, sighing, "but if what you say is true, and I suppose you ought to know—I'd like you to think it over for a matter of—say—ten bob a week rise and a bonus. You're worth it. Fair's fair."

This was indeed a temptation. Ten shillings a week more would be a great help until Jonathan published his book. I was not very sure what she meant by a bonus, and when I put the case to Jonathan he would have none of it, and said I could stay on for a month if I liked to oblige the—"old bitch," but no longer.

A month. . . .

If we could look forward as we look back, watching the tide of Yesterday sweep on towards To-day and powerless to check

it; if, knowing what we know and still can see, would it be possible to avert the course of destiny and by delaying the inevitable moment, alter the beat of that mysterious rhythm we call life? I think not: for if every event has its own cause invariable and unconditional, so every event must have its pre-existence, even as Time itself that binds man to its eternal wheel, without beginning, without end.

There was for me no warning, no momentary tremor that I can recall as premonition. My dreams were undisturbed, my thoughts were sweet, and spring was here again in all its gay forgetting.

That month was ours, full of light and laughter, the darkness gone, and I was twenty-one.

Charles dined with us. We had no birthday party, drank no wine; they toasted me in ale, and after dinner we sat and talked awhile and then at Jonathan's suggestion paid a visit to the stables to show Charles the mare Drumlohen, sent from Ireland that week. Jonathan had stabled her near by at a hackney jobbers'. He groomed her himself and loved her like a lover. She was lovely, too, a hot chestnut with no touch of white about her except round the red of her eye.

Jonathan was proud to exhibit her to Charles, holding the lantern high for him to see her points and admire. "She'll let no one go near her but me," he said, "she remembers me. It was I who broke her in four years ago, when she was a filly. The journey has upset her—she's not settled down yet. I'm going to hunt her this autumn."

She stretched her neck to nuzzle him, and he pulled her ears and whispered in the language that only she and he could understand. Then while he locked the stable-door and we stood waiting for him in the yard, Charles turned to me and said, "I think, my dear, we're going to win this fight. . . ."

And less than a week after that, his trouble was on him again with all the danger signals: the restlessness, the uncontrolled fits of hysterical rage at his work, at me, Augusta; and the nights—those fear-crossed nights when he groaned and whimpered in his sleep and woke screaming, to turn and hold me for comfort while I soothed and watched beside him. There was no more sleep for me.

I sent an urgent message to Charles by hand and he answered it, "Yes, I know. I have been expecting it. Don't be discouraged. It may be the last attack. I will come up to

dinner to-night. Try not to let him go out."

But how to keep him in?

It was a Saturday, I remember, and the Mikado shut on Saturday, so I had nothing to do that afternoon and could stay with him on guard. He had eaten no luncheon and complained of a migraine. I gave him sal volatile and begged him to lie down. He took the dose under protest, saying, "If I lie down I shall never get up. I must work. There's my book to be finished—it must be *finished*."

"You'll finish it," I said.

He looked at me strangely. "You think? . . . God and the devil are in me to-day. Which one will win?" And like a child he told me, "I'm thirsty—so thirsty."

I fetched him a drink of barley-water. He drank it in one draught and returned the empty glass with a smile. "No heel-taps."

"Go and rest, love," I begged him, and he went with heart-rending docility up to his room and lay on the bed, his head turned sideways on the pillow gazing not at, but through me, to a distance far beyond. "I think now," he said, "I shall sleep."

I stayed with him till he slept. . . . I could swear I left him sleeping.

At half-past five I took him up a cup of tea. The room was empty. I called Augusta. "Did you hear Mr Rourke go out?"

"Yes, 'm. He went out the back way to the stables. He said he was goin' for a ride."

To ride down the demons that fought him. The red mare and he were one; she would not let him be beaten.

I waited.

When Charles arrived at seven he had not returned, and he should have returned an hour ago for surely he would not be out after dusk.

"We had better go to the stables," said Charles.

There we were told he had taken the mare and gone about four o'clock.

We waited together, Charles and I, back and forth between home and the stables, and back again to watch the clock till it struck ten. I said, "We must go and look for him."

"I'll go," Charles said, "you stay."

He and two men from the stables rode out each on their separate ways; two others followed in a dog-cart and I followed after on foot, down the Spaniards Road—Dick Turpin's way to the North

—running till my breath gave out and I stopped there in the lonely night, listening, while the sound of hoofs died on the howl of the wind.

A black ugly night with no stars, and a moon like a death's-head grinning behind a beggar's cloak of cloud. The wind caught me when I ran on again and forced me back with its talons in my hair and its teeth in my face. I slackened and walked, and stood, and walked again, and ran for fear of myself and the whistling dark to the sheltered hollows of sand and turf and undergrowth, past the copse of silver birches where the darkness was soft and the wind's voice a whisper.

And I laid myself to the earth and prayed till I had no prayer left in me.

I knew then . . . I knew before my lagging steps reached home, before I saw that glimmer of light at the gate and the dim figures of men who carried something stretched—I knew this moment that now shaped itself was the crisis for which I had been waiting, to which I was foredoomed, and yet had stayed until this moment, unrevealed.

This much I was given: that he still lived and that it was Charles and no stranger who had found him where he lay, broken in his fall, with the red mare standing quiet at his side.

They brought him to the couch in our small parlour. Charles sent the men away and came to me. To my voiceless question he could give no answer, but there was no need to tell me what I knew.

I knelt beside my husband; his eyes were not quite shut, and shining very blue between the lids. What did they see? They were seeing—surely they saw? His lips made the smallest movement; I heard him whisper, "Charles. . . ." He tried to lift his hand. Charles took it . . . and Jonathan smiled.

I fastened my lips to his holding that smile upon them.

"He has won his fight," Charles said.

* * *

Across the road where the Terrace runs into the Square had been placed a barricade.

Here a taxi stopped, and a man of middle age, stoutly built and wearing the uniform of a naval captain with a good display of ribbons on his chest, got out, and telling the driver to wait, walked briskly towards the shambles that once had been a house.

The old lady, standing very still and small among the debris, did not hear his step; she heard nothing till she turned, her sight a little misted, to see him there beside her. "Charles! You? . . ." and passing her gas-mask from one hand to the other, she touched his gold-laced sleeve, not quite believing. . . . "How did you know I would be here? When did you arrive?"

"To-day, for ten days' leave."

"Ten . . . oh, darling!" A warm flush quavered up into her face.

"Augusta told me you had gone to see what Jerry's done to the old house, so I thought I'd better come along and pick you up." Under the peak of his cap he cocked an eyebrow. "It seems he's done his damndest. Still, it might have been worse. He might have hit what he was aiming at—for once. And taking his handkerchief, he carefully wiped a wetness that lingered in the faint tracery of wrinkles on her cheeks from which the flush had faded.

She made her lips firm to say: "Your dear father used always to do that. You grow so wonderfully like him. When I saw you I thought for a moment. . . ."

He put an arm round her shoulders.

"I met him," she said, "for the first time in this house when I was ten."

"Yes, darling," he smiled down at her, "I know. And he upset his champagne on you."

"No, it was I," she corrected, "who upset the champagne—and then I fell downstairs and cut my head."

"And bled all over his shirt," he said, with a laugh at the back of his eyes; for he had heard the tale many times before, and would hear it many times again. He glanced at his wrist-

watch. "What about a spot of lunch?"

"There was," his mother whispered. "a child under here."

"We'll make them pay for child murder," said her son.

And with his arm to guide her over the broken glass, they passed along the shattered pavement and away.

LONDON. *January-August, 1941.*

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